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DID SHE LOVE HIM ?

LONDON :
ROBSON AND SONS, PRINTERS, PANCRAS ROAD, N.W.

DID SHE LOVE HIM?

A Novel.

By JAMES GRANT,

AUTHOR OF 'THE ROMANCE OF WAR,' 'UNDER THE RED DRAGON,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8 CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1876.

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25/- d. 698



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DID SHE LOVE HIM?

CHAPTER I.

IN PARK LANE.

‘**SHE** is the handsomest girl in the room!’ exclaimed Tom Seymour emphatically.

‘Bar one,’ replied his friend, smiling.

‘Bar none, Stanley. Mabel Brooke is the dearest girl in the room—if not in all London.’

‘To you, of course; yet I agree with you that she is lovely.’

‘That fellow always wishes to monopolise too much of her time, though.’

‘He is only her cousin, Alf Foxley.’

‘A thorough fox in character,’ said Seymour, knitting his brows; ‘moreover, his

position as cousin at times puts him a devilish deal too much in my way.'

It was at a crowded ball, one of the last of a gay London season, and in one of those stately mansions about a musket-shot distant from the Marble Arch, that these remarks were made; and the speakers were Tom Seymour and Rowland Stanley, a captain of the Line, who, in the recess of a window, were glancing from time to time at their engagement-cards, watching the dancers, and confiding to each other their admiration for and their hopes concerning two of the fairest there; for they were bosom friends, great chums, had been schoolfellows at Harrow in former times, and though the professional avocations of the soldier often separated them, they always met again with emotions of strong regard for each other.

Both were more than average good-looking young fellows, of a type that is thoroughly and peculiarly English: Seymour was fair-complexioned and sanguine in temperament, with clear blue eyes; while Stanley was dark,

his handsome face, like his neck, well browned by a tropical sun, was closely shaven, all save a smart thick brown moustache, while his curly pate was closely shorn to the regimental pattern, and, though in accurate full-dress 'mufti,' there was no mistaking him for anything else than what he was, an easy-going and light-hearted young English officer.

'I see that your eyes follow Miss Allingham everywhere,' said Seymour, laughing.

'Who is that fellow with whom she is dancing—I had almost said coquetting?' asked Stanley.

'Val Reynolds, of the Guards. He had the handsomest drag in the Hyde Park procession of the Four-in-Hand Club at the end of May last.'

'Probably his chief recommendation in this world.'

'To West-end mammas, especially,' said Seymour, with the slightest bitterness of tone.

'He has all the self-assured look of a man about town.'

'And on the occasion I refer to, his mag-

nificent team of grays and his mode of handling the ribbons won him great applause. By the way, you rather affect the fair Allingham, I think.'

Stanley's honest sunburnt face reddened slightly as he said:

'I have never made a secret of that to you, Tom.'

'She is the greatest flirt in the room.'

'Come, come, Tom, don't say so,' said Stanley, giving his moustache an angry twirl.

'Fact, my dear fellow; I spent a month with her at Thaneshurst, Brooke's place in Sussex, and know how she dotes on admiration.'

'A month! and yet, with all the facilities of a country-house, you did not fall in love with her?'

'You forget that Mabel Brooke was there,' said Seymour, with something of sadness or irritation in his tone.

'Both girls are indeed beautiful,' remarked Stanley; '(by the way, I have not yet seen her mamma to-night, the crowd is so great,)

and if they seem so to all, what must they be to *me*, who have so lately been among the brown women—the sallow Eurasians and the bleached Europeans of Hindostan.'

And while the friends conversed thus, the dancers were whirling in the waltz under a flood of light from the crystal chandeliers, and the music of the quadrille band seemed to fill the whole of the great house with melody.

The object of Tom Seymour's admiration was one whom sensational novels would describe as a beautiful 'being,' yet she was a thoroughly practical little fairy, whose earthly name was Mabel Brooke, but the style of whose beauty it is difficult to describe. It was a sweet soft Saxon kind; the shape of her head, the grace of her neck and shoulders, the little tricks of manner with her 'quick small hand' were all perfect, while her whole air was gentle, refined, and charming; but her wealth placed her upon a kind of throne or pedestal far above Seymour: he could only worship at a distance. A clerk in the City, well born but poor, he felt tongue-tied and helpless, yet that

month at Thaneshurst had changed the whole current of his existence.

Her friend Milly Allingham was very different in bearing from Mabel. She was prouder in manner, more reserved at times, sometimes leaving gentlemen in doubt as to whether they had offended her. She was a dark-eyed beauty, with rich brown hair and features approaching the aquiline. She was stately and queenlike, or swanlike, in every action ; thus these, all unstudied as they were, became somehow statuesque ; yet her pride of bearing belied her, for she was not less childlike in grace or less warm-hearted and impulsive than her 'gossip' Mabel Brooke.

They had an exceedingly schoolgirl plea for friendship and romantic affinity—the important facts of both being only daughters, and both having been born on the same day, though miles apart; for the hazel eyes of Milly first saw the light in her father's house at Hyde-park Corner; and the violet-blue orbs of Mabel somewhere nearer the sound of Bow Bells than her mamma cared to re-

member, now that she was Mrs. John Brooke, of No. — Park Lane, and of Thaneshurst in Sussex.

Both were girls of a highly-nervous temperament or sensitive nature; thus they were joyous, pliant, and kindly in heart; they could feel sorrow and joy more keenly than many that were around them. Both were rather emotional; tears would well in their eyes at the relation of any deed of brilliant daring, any event of deep sorrow, a telling picture or a touching song. Such things as these sufficed to fill the hearts of both with soft sympathies and vague yearnings; but as yet life was all sunshine and a butterfly existence, a shadowless career, to Milly Allingham and Mabel Brooke.

On this night in particular the aspect of the stately house and all its surroundings chilled the ardour and unnerved the heart of Seymour; its long corridors with elaborate pilasters, coloured lamps, and encaustic tiles; the ceilings picked out in pink and gold; the soft carpets, the white bearskins, and tall

Sèvres jars or Italian bronzes on marble pedestals; the crowded ballroom, with its West-end belles in all the glories of Swan and Edgar, and such suites of flashing jewels as Bond Street alone can produce; while from *jardinières* of ormolu, blue and gold, came the perfume of the hyacinth and rose, the violet and myosotis; and Tom sighed as he thought of his own abode in a shabby boarding-house in the vicinity of Harley Street; nor could the warm and honest greeting of his host, who shook him heartily by the hand, reassure him, though his father had been Mr. Brooke's oldest and dearest friend.

‘Seen Mrs. Brooke yet, Seymour?’ he asked.

The latter faintly said ‘No.’

‘This way—here she is.’

And though Seymour had spent, on his host's invitation, some weeks at their place in the country, he approached Mrs. Brooke with extreme diffidence to-night.

‘Martha dear, our friend Tom Seymour,’ said the old gentleman to his ample better half, who was seated amid a group of matrons



and chaperones; but 'Martha dear' had resolved to seem only half-conscious of her young guest's presence or existence. She gave a barely perceptible movement of her head and a toss of her glittering fan, as much as to say:

'There, that will do; now you may go and join the dancers if you can get a partner.'

Seymour felt that her greeting was only a kind of contemptuous snort, nothing more, and very different from the brilliant 'company smile' she accorded to Reynolds, the tall Guardsman, and others, even to his friend Stanley, who now presented himself *pro formâ*. Lofty, proud, fat, flat-footed, and naturally imperious, all diamonds and satin without, and empty vanity and ambition within, how, thought Tom, had she ever such a daughter as Mabel?

And ere long she saw him join her daughter, little wotting that on her card sundry places had been specially kept vacant for *his* name; yet, with all her cold pride of manner, Mrs. Brooke was a woman of good birth; the daughter of a very poor baronet, she had, as

she thought, condescended in marrying John Brooke, the City man, to atone for which all her ideas and energies were concentrated on having a titled son-in-law; and how she succeeded or failed we shall see.

But though a City man in tone and temperament, her worthy spouse came of a good old English family, though he recked little of that; thus it was no ostentation to see their crest, a demi-seahorse, on everything, from the silver forks to the buttons of the well-matched footmen, when one could read that his ancestors had borne it on their helmets in many a French and Scottish war.

He had married later in life than most men usually do; he was very stout, with a bald head that shone like a billiard ball, fringed by a circle of silver hair; he had a bright, benevolent, cheery face, with several chins falling over his white necktie; and indeed, with his amplitude of paunch, over which a vest was curving, he might have passed for the twin-brother of Mr. Mulbery, his own butler.

CHAPTER II.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

ABOUT the same time that Rowland Stanley claimed Miss Allingham, Seymour's heart had quickened when, in reply to his half-audible—"Our dance, I think, Miss Brooke?" Mabel put her arm through his, and gave him one of her pretty caressing smiles, which he felt very bewildering; and she smoothed her gloves on the prettiest of hands—a pair of the most delicate kids, a beautiful box of which she had thoughtlessly won from poor Seymour at the last University boatrace, when dark-blue and light-blue were all the rage, and balconies at Chiswick were at a premium, and Hammersmith Bridge rocked perilously beneath its living freight.

She seemed so happy and so bright as she leaned on the arm of her unacknowledged, or rather unavowed, lover—clinging to him, as

it were, at times breathless, flushed, and fanning herself after their waltz—that who could ever imagine her future should be a dark one and full of tears !

‘ You will leave town soon now, I presume ? ’ said he.

‘ In a week, I believe ; but you will come again to Thaneshurst, of course, Mr. Seymour ; but I fear you find our circle a dull one down in Sussex. Papa, though we live in a hunting county, cares nothing for horses ; but studies the money-article in the *Times*, and talks only about ‘ Change and Mincing Lane, as if he still went to that odious office in the City, which, thank Heaven, I only know by name.’

And thus she chattered on, amid the splendour and wealth that ‘ odious ’ office had won her.

‘ The next waltz is ours,’ said a voice suddenly in her ear ; and beside them stood her cousin, Alfred Foxley, who barely accorded the tips of his fingers to Seymour. Though gentlemanly in bearing, and rather

good-looking, he had a repulsive kind of twinkle in his gray-green eyes, and a cruel form of lip and jaw, which his sandy-coloured moustache and closely-clipped beard concealed. Mabel glanced at the embossed card which dangled at her fan, and said, with the slightest perceptible shade of annoyance :

‘Excuse me, cousin Alf; my engagements with you are all over—my card is full.’

‘Already !’

‘Of course ; but there is little Fanny Conyers, and there are ever so many more.’

‘Bah ! the Conyers girl always dances as if she had a stone in her hoof.’

‘Now, Alf, don’t be horsey and cross too,’ said she, tapping him playfully with her fan ; while Seymour’s arm went round her waist, and they whirled away from her cousin’s side, gliding out and in amid the maze to Strauss’s noblest air.

With the keen eyes of that jealousy ‘which makes the food it feeds on,’ Alfred Foxley watched them ; he saw the secret interest in his cousin’s heart for Seymour, or rather the

preference she gave him. In a word, he did not love his cousin with all her beauty, but he loved her wealth, or the wealth which he knew must be hers in time to come. Aware how limited were the means of Tom Seymour, he did not fear, though he hated, him as a rival, and had but one idea—to ruin him in her estimation and that of every one else. He had long thought deeply over this, and he could see no possible plan to achieve his wicked end; but there came a fatal season when to jealousy were added promptings of revenge to be gratified.

The rooms were becoming more full than ever. About midnight languid young swells from the Opera or their clubs came dropping in, with an air as if they were about to drop to pieces—with parted hair, faultless gloves, studs, and neckties—eyeing even the handsomest girls superciliously, or with a pretended patronising air of connoisseurship. So others now claimed the hand of Miss Brooke, and Seymour went in search of his chum Rowland Stanley, who had unwillingly relin-

quished *his* partner to the tall Guardsman, who had monopolised the proud beauty for more of the night than our Linesman quite relished.

He saw the long-legged hero with the parted hair bending over her in the pauses of the dance, and apparently talking to her with an *empressement* that inspired him with emotions the reverse of amiable, but which would have been soothed had he overheard that Reynolds was only boasting that he 'belonged to the *old*, not the new Four-in-Hand Club, though they drove their teams together in unity on certain days.'

Then, when Milly's face became brightly animated, and she seemed quite oblivious of his presence while listening to Reynolds, the latter was *not* pouring idle compliments or soft flatteries into her ear; but as there had been a splendid *levée* that afternoon at St. James's—a collar-day, when the wearers of all orders were fully decorated—he was only detailing the appearance of some of the grandees he had seen while on duty with his

troop; and Milly Allingham, who was proud and ambitious by nature, and who dearly loved all connected with 'Lords and ladies and Knights of the Garter,' listened with her eyes beaming brightly; and then Stanley could only remember with anger that Reynolds was heir to a peerage, that he was a man of wealth, undoubtedly an eligible *parti*, and sufficiently good-looking to be a dangerous rival; moreover, that he had many facilities for meeting Milly Allingham, as she was always with Mabel; and Mrs. Brooke—having secret views of her own—fearless of exciting comment, gave him a seat in her carriage to every race, and a perpetual ticket to her box at the Opera.

So there were several wheels revolving within each other amid the well-bred hum of these drawing-rooms in Park Lane.

Rowland Stanley had no lack of partners, for a handsome and well-bred *militaire* is generally the best style of man in a young girl's eye; but when he failed to obtain Milly's hand, he seemed to care little for dancing at



all. She liked his attentions, and she knew right well that he admired and probably loved her, for he had hovered about her during the whole season ; but if he loved her, he never said so, even with his eyes. A hundred times had a tender avowal trembled on the lip of Stanley, who did not want for a certain amount of 'modest assurance ;' but there was always an undefinable something, of hauteur, of coldness and sudden reserve in her manner—a haughty carriage of her handsome head when she seemed, as it were, to crest up—that repelled him or checked him, even when his heart was full of adoration ; for pride was the powerful and predominating trait in the character of the girl, whose secret heart—however serene and calm her exterior—was naturally true and warm, even to passionateness. Moreover, unlike his friend Seymour, Stanley was a man of means, and independent of his commission, but both men were as yet silent and unavowed lovers.

Though no expression of regard had fallen from Seymour—who had a nervous fear that

to do so would end all between them—Mabel felt and knew instinctively that he loved her, and had a pleased consciousness that his eyes were admiringly bent upon her, watching her every movement. So even now, when she seemed to be floating in the waltz or galop with others, or threading her way with swan-like grace through double sets of the Lancers, his memory was wandering away to the pleasant past time in Sussex—that brief country visit which was a kind of oasis in his arid City work-a-day life; and what a crowding it was of remembered days and hours, and sentences half uttered and tender words arrested, in that brief space; what memories of rides and rambles with her over the green breezy downs, where the brown rabbits peeped up from their holes; by the ivied ruins of the old castle of Lewes, repeopling it anew with knights and dames; or sketching it from the Battle Hill, where Henry III. was defeated by his barons; of rowing on the Ouse, of picnics in the woods, and drives in the open carriage as far as Brighton, to watch the great billows



come thundering against the walls of the Marine Parade, and to laugh at the bathers clinging to their safety-ropes as they bobbed in the white surf like fishermen's floats ; and together how they had strolled amid the wonders of the Aquarium, or sat side by side at the brilliant concerts in its crowded hall, listening to pretty Patti, or Titiens Queen of Song.

Then there were the promenades with the Cavalry - band ; and he pondered over the many opportunities he had for saying that which, too probably, he should never dare to say—that she was all the world to him, and dearer than the breath of his nostrils ; and how hard to think that a day might come when he would have to congratulate her as the wife of *another* !

And he recalled their days of rink-skating, at Ryde and Brighton, and the secret delight of guiding her hand-in-hand and supporting—yea, clasping—her, when she tottered or stumbled on her four-wheeled wooden skates ; and she did stumble so often when *he* was near—at least so he flattered himself. And

among other memories came back an occasion when, out with the Brighton Harriers, he clumsily got among them, and trampled ever so many to death at Pyecombe; and on another, brought down a favourite nag of Mr. Brooke's, destroying two hundred guineas' worth of good horseflesh—on both events being stigmatised as 'a duffing City clerk'; and none sympathised with him, he knew, but gentle Mabel, who was aware that in both instances he had only been trying to keep near her and to take the flying-leaps at the same time; but these were offences such as sporting men can never forgive or tolerate.

Would all this pleasant intercourse ever come to pass again?

On the occasion of his dancing with her for the last time that night, Mabel had seen her cousin Alfred bending over her mamma and whispering in her ear, while his eyes were bent upon herself; and it seemed to her—though it might be fancy—that the unpleasant phrase 'Cad' reached her.



Now the result of this whispering soon took tangible form. Mrs. Brooke beckoned her daughter to the door of the conservatory, and said in frigid manner:

‘Pardon me detaining you for one moment, child.’

‘Yes, mamma.’

‘Show me your engagement-card. Here is that Mr. Seymour’s name down for five dances out of twenty-one, and three of these are waltzes. You dance with him too often, Mabel.’

‘Mamma!’

‘I will talk more to you of this matter tomorrow.’

‘What have I done that is wrong?’ urged the girl.

‘He is an ineligible *parti*; and when I was young, I neither wasted my time or my gloves by dancing with such. Your papa is stupid to bring such people about the house!’

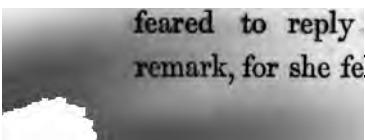
Mabel only sighed to think that poor Tom Seymour was so nice and her mamma so openly sordid.

‘These five dances,’ she continued, again examining the card, ‘you might have given to Captain Reynolds.’

‘But he only asked me for one, mamma ; and why to him in particular ?’ said Mabel gently.

‘My dear child, only think of his expectations ; and even now he has a place in the country worth ten thousand a year, a hunting-box in Leicestershire, a moor in the Highlands, a yacht at Ryde, a fiord in Norway ; and some say he will have a prairie soon, whereon you may shoot buffaloes !’

So Mabel thought, as she went back to her seat on her mamma’s arm, that there was little doubt about it—her envious cousin *had* been taking an interest in her movements, and it was to Seymour the unpleasant epithet had been applied. So Mabel took refuge in a headache, and danced no more for the remainder of that night, or rather morning. Seymour hovered by her side ; but she almost feared to reply to his most commonplace remark, for she felt that the eye of her mother



was upon her. She looked nervously down, and toyed with the camellias of a beautiful bouquet which had been sent to her that afternoon, she knew very well by *whom*.

At last the thinning of the crowd in the rooms, and the incessant roll of carriages, announced that the time had come to go; and Stanley and Seymour paid their adieux together.

‘To-morrow you will be in the Row, as usual, I suppose, Miss Brooke?’ said the latter, almost in a whisper.

‘Yes, as usual, but for the last time—at noon,’ she replied in the same *sotto voce*, while she coloured slightly.

‘How sadly the *last* time always sounds!’

‘Pupkins takes our horses down by train the day after to-morrow.’

‘I shall take a canter in the Row, and—and perhaps may have the pleasure of seeing you. Good-night.’

‘Or morning, rather,’ said Mabel, smiling. ‘I can hear the birds singing in the Park. And you have enjoyed yourself?’

‘More than language can express!’ replied Seymour fervently, as he bowed himself out.

They separated; and though they seemed merely to shake hands as usual, Tom’s heart was brimming with joy, so that he failed to detect the malevolence in the smile of Foxley, as he bade him farewell. He *had* overheard?

To meet to-morrow in the Row seemed, somehow, an appointment; but, to use his own phrase, matters were ‘less rosy’ with Rowland Stanley. He had shawled and escorted to the carriage Miss Allingham, while Seymour looked after the chaperone, amid the hub-bub of obstinate and imperious coachmen, cutting in and cutting out, thus causing much confusion, and occasionally some lively vituperation, with carriages interlocked and horses rearing.

‘Whose beauty struck you most to-night, Captain Stanley?’ asked Milly, with the most perfect unconsciousness.

‘I dare not tell you,’ he replied in an agitated tone; and added hurriedly, ‘Will

you give me the rosebud you wear in your breast?"

"Why?" she asked, smiling.

"That I may keep it for ever, in memory—of to-night!" he replied with genuine fervour.

"Oh, yes, if it will gratify you," said she, disengaging it from the corsage of her dress. She was in the act of presenting the trifle to her admirer, when, suddenly, she added, "I don't like these little bits of melodrama. Thanks, and good-night, Captain Stanley!"

And as the footman drew up the window, he saw that she had tossed the much-coveted flower, with a proud and petulant air, to the bottom of the carriage.

Stanley turned, and saw the tall Guardsman, Val Reynolds, in the act of lifting his hat to her, as, with a loose overcoat on, and an unlit cigar between his teeth, he came leisurely down the doorsteps.

"And because *his* eyes were upon ~~us~~ she cancelled her trifling favour!" thought Stanley, with a gush of jealous bitterness; "I am

the greatest muff in the world to think of one so proud and volatile.'

He stood still a moment, looking, nevertheless, after her carriage, as, with many others, it rolled away towards the Marble Arch ; and when Seymour joined him they lit their cigars, and walked leisurely away, comparing their notes as they walked by Stanhope Gate, and left behind them the noble Park, where the birds were carolling loudly, and where the soft air of the summer night was giving place to the chiller breath of early morning. Stanley's quarters were, for the time, at his club ; so he walked slowly homeward, thinking, with Sir Toby Belch, that 'not to be abed after midnight is to be up betimes.'

On the other hand, Seymour little knew that long after he had gone to dream, as he hoped, of Mabel, in his attic bedroom, and long after the windows of Park Lane and the waters of the Serpentine were shining in rosy light, that, oblivious of sleep, she had sat in her dressing-robe, after her sleepy maid had

‘done’ her magnificent bright-coloured hair, before her toilet-table, oblivious too of its many rare treasures of jewelry, crystal bottles, and Sèvres china dishes, thinking of him, and of him only!

CHAPTER III.

IN THE ROW.

IT was about six o'clock on a July evening when the two friends turned their horses round the Marble Arch, and rode through Hyde Park. Stanley had, of course, his own horse—a thorough-going bay roadster, high in the forehead, round in the barrel, and deep in the chest; a kind of animal more difficult to find in perfection than even the hunter or racer; but Seymour had jobbed a hack from one of the many stables in the immediate vicinity of the abode wherein his limited salary compelled him to vegetate—a dull boarding-house, near Harley Street, inhabited usually by officers on leave, small annuitants, cranky old maids, or dubious widows, who, however, were most particular in displaying their marriage-rings.

As this is the usual time for 'the Lady's

Mile,' the noble drive under the elms and lindens—all powdered with summer dust from Kensington Gore and Knightsbridge—was crowded with equipages; ranks of magnificent carriages were whirling past in lines—in many of them the loveliest women in the world, attired in costumes that London alone can produce. Some, however, were mounted (though the time was evening), and, attended by grooms or cavaliers, all on the most satin-skinned and irreproachable cattle, were careering along the soft and carefully made-up pathway of the Row. And all this was passing under a blaze of glorious sunshine, with a pleasant breeze rustling the foliage of the trees.

Though only half the extent of what it was in the days of Cromwell, or when old Evelyn saw the quartered bodies of the regicides borne, 'cut, mangled, and reeking in baskets,' from the place which is now Tyburnia, Hyde Park is still what Lord Chatham so happily characterised it as one of the greatest 'lungs of the metropolis,' and it is

strange, as Dr. Waagen says truly, 'to fancy, in the midst of the vast town, the most verdant lawns, of very great extent, here and there adorned with picturesque groups of trees, broken by large pieces of water, and to complete the rural appearance, numbers of sheep and cows feeding on them; then fancy the striking effect of the great masses of architecture, such as Westminster Abbey, rising in the distance above this verdant world.' And here and there are dotted, over all these London parks, giant stems, gnarled and hollow, yet sprouting still, the ruins of old trees, that were old when a leper hospital occupied the site of St. James's Palace, and Whitehall had not been dreamed of.

Intent upon those of whom they were in search, the two friends rode somewhat silently and at an easy pace amid the brilliant throng that whirled in circles past them.

It was in the hope that Miss Allingham might accompany Miss Brooke, that Stanley had come with Seymour to the Park on this afternoon, though half despising himself for



doing so, after her brusque action last night, prompted, as he believed it to be, by the presence of Valentine Reynolds. But a genuine love fit cures one of all pride in such cases. Stanley knew well that these fair friends were always coupled; that they rode and lunched, walked, shopped, and sung together, and together he hoped they would be on this occasion in the Row.

An occasional dropper-in on her mamma's reception days, five-o'clock teas, &c., how often had he idled, cane and hat in hand, talking the veriest commonplaces to her, with his heart on his lips, and gone forth to count the days till he might, without exciting remark, venture to call again!

'You know, Tom,' said he, 'she reads every book I recommend, admires every passage I suggest to her criticism, sings every song I prefer, takes all the music and flowers I may offer; makes bets, and wins ever so many dozens of gloves; keeps places for me on her engagement-cards; even makes me *au fait* of the houses where she is sure to be;

but somehow I make no further progress; there is at times something so deuced proud and stand-off about her. I love her very dearly, yet our intercourse has only the appearance of a dangler's friendship—a mere flirtation.'

'I would that I were on a footing so free and easy with Mabel Brooke,' replied Seymour; 'but flirtation often leads to something better, dearer, fonder, more lasting; and with such a girl as Milly Allingham, it is perilous work, Stanley—playing with edged tools, in fact.'

The captain felt the truth of this, and rode on for a time in silence.

'To what a pitch—or low peg, rather—of folly and slavery does this girl's beauty reduce me!' thought he; 'after all I have seen of the world, at home and abroad; all the women I have known, and all the risks and hardships I have undergone on service in India! Her loveliness allures, her pride piques, her coquetry maddens me, causing me almost at times to hate the chain that binds me. What

strange idiosyncrasy of the human mind is this? There is a clever writer who affirms that “it is quite possible to love and hate the same person, at the same moment;” that is, I suppose, to love, and writhe under—perhaps disdain oneself for—the bondage of the heart in which one is kept.’

Amid his unuttered soliloquy, and just as he was resolving to steel himself against her—poor moth!—the pulses of his heart quickened painfully, yet joyfully, when Seymour exclaimed, ‘By Jove, here come the Brookes’ carriage, and open too! Thank Heaven, the girls are alone, and the *mater* is not there.’

And in a few seconds each had lifted his hat to his divinity, ‘the goddess of his idolatry,’ as they reclined back in the softly-cushioned carriage, in the prettiest of bonnets, and both smiling brightly under the fringe of her tiny parasol, and both looking as bright as the sunshine, though they had been—~~as~~ in Mabel’s instance—in every dance overnight; but, to be sure, their day had not begun till about one P.M. On her knee Milly Allingham

had a flossy Maltese terrier, to Stanley's mind the most envied cur in London. As it was impossible for the carriage to stop just then, each wheeled his horse alongside of her he wished to address ; and that Milly changed colour was very evident, when she saw Stanley ; for undoubtedly he had become to her more than any one of those men whom, in the whirl of London society during the season, she was always meeting at one house or another, being in the 'same set ;' for Stanley, now on leave from his regiment, was in great request for everything, being as popular with the matrons of the land as with many of their marriageable daughters.

The ball of last night ; the hopes that the ladies were not weary ; the wind, the weather, and the chances of rain—all safe topics—were duly discussed with the earnestness usually devoted to them ; and then it appeared as if the conversation was about to flag, till Mabel Brooke said :

‘I am *so* glad, Mr. Seymour, that the season is over.’

‘Why?’

‘I have grown weary of gaiety—sick of what the world calls “society,” and long now for the seclusion—if it can be called so in a house full of people—at Thaneshurst. You remember,’ she added, while her eyelids drooped, ‘how delightful it was there last autumn?’

‘Could I ever forget?’

And as their eyes met, a glance was exchanged which conveyed a volume—ay, three volumes—and made poor Tom’s heart leap within him.

‘Oh, yes,’ added the girl sweetly, ‘I do love dear Thaneshurst. You must come and see us there, Captain Stanley.’ (She spoke to the captain, but her eyes wandered to Seymour.) ‘You are quite a pet of mamma’s. She “dotes on the military.” Don’t you see what a fuss she makes with Captain Reynolds? We have always a pleasant houseful at Thaneshurst. In the old mail-coach or pre-railway times, when people dwelt contented in their own petty village centres or circles, people could care for few—’

‘And love, no doubt, but one and one only,’ interrupted Milly Allingham.

‘And now we can know, care for, and even love ever so many. We live in pleasanter times than those of our jog-trot ancestors.’

Tom Seymour smiled at the girl’s vivacity ; but thought, with a sigh, that, in the frugal days referred to, wealth perhaps might not have throned his divinity so far beyond his reach. Perhaps some such ideas were floating in the mind of Mabel ; she feared to extend to him the half-invitation so glibly given to his friend ; and as this was, too probably, the last day on which she should see him, she could not help looking at him with something of sadness and interest.

There is no doubt that Seymour was as handsome a young fellow as one may see anywhere. His fair brown hair started in sprouts from his fine and thoughtful forehead like the locks of a Phidian Jove ; he had kind, gentle, and loving eyes—especially when they met *hers* ; a pleasing smile and good-humoured mouth, yet he was generally, perforce of cir-



cumstances, grave ; and he had a rich baritone voice that every one admired, save Mrs. Brooke, whose patience could not stand his concerted duets and pieces with her daughter Mabel.

The eyes of these two conveyed much to each other, though their lips uttered little.

Meanwhile another 'little game' was being acted on Stanley's side of the carriage, when Miss Allingham, with a half-blush in her usually pale cheeks, said suddenly :

'I was pettish to you last night—even rude I fear ; so now forgive me by accepting this little flower from my bouquet to-day.'

It was a rosebud with some sprigs of forget-me-not.

Stanley murmured his earnest thanks as he placed it in his button-hole, and thought, perhaps a little bitterly, 'She gives me this small trifle because *he* is not here !' But this emotion was only momentary. The trivial episode, the little gift so prettily given, the tone of voice, the half-timid expression in the usually proud face and clear well-opened eyes,

all lifted Stanley's heart to the seventh heaven ; and long after in fancy he conned and dreamed and acted it all over again, and remembered that when he had said, 'Thank you—thanks, a thousand times,' and gently touched her gloved hand, it was *not*—as it had been on two previous occasions—hastily withdrawn, for he was somewhat of a Grandison in his love-making. But now the throng was so great that they could no longer accompany the carriage, which bowled on its way, without the horsemen ; but, as the latter lifted their hats and drew their reins, Seymour saw—or fancied that he saw—an expression in the farewell smile of Mabel that he never forgot.

They had scarcely separated when Alfred Foxley, mounted on a fine gray horse, rode slowly past in close attendance on the tiniest of broughams, wherein sat a fair one with golden locks, whom nobody seemed to know, yet all, or most, knew her perfectly well as Miss Aimée de Bohun, the handsomest ballet-girl in town, as her *carte de visite* was scattered broadcast over all London to such an extent



that one might think her whole time was passed in sitting to photographers.

She had a handsome salary, yet the initiated knew that the sealskin jackets in which she came to rehearsal, the diamonds that sparkled on her fingers, the rare bouquets of Ninfa Egeria camellias white as snow that awaited her at the stage-door, like the cases of claret that were sent her, and the dinners she gave at the Trafalgar or Star and Garter to her theatrical friends, to Val Reynolds and certain other languid and magnificent beings of the male sex, were not the produce of her fascinating fandangos and *pas seuls*.

Perhaps it was some knowledge of this that made Foxley colour with vexation when he passed Stanley, but more especially his rival Seymour, as he had given Mabel to understand over-night that he was going to see the Blues and Hussars play at polo at Lillie Bridge in the evening.

They exchanged a meaning smile as they left the Park by the Albert Gate, very well satisfied with their interview—Seymour more

especially. It had been something so like a rendezvous ; and if Mabel had seen her cousin, as he did not doubt she must, the escort duty on which he was employed would not raise *him* much in her estimation.

‘Stanley,’ he suddenly exclaimed, ‘I would give all I have in the world—’

‘All you *owe* would, perhaps, be better still.’

‘Perhaps so.’

‘But for what, my boy ?’

‘One kiss of that girl’s hand ere she leaves London !’

‘She goes by the first down train at noon to-morrow,’ was the captain’s matter-of-fact reply to his friend’s outburst.

Tom might never have had the little privilege so coveted, yet he had a kind of assurance in his heart that, but for her parents’ pride, and more especially her mother’s ambition, the wealthiest bachelor of the season had not such a chance of success with *her* as he had ; and he thought that, with Mabel for a helpmate, what a long and delicious idyl life would be !



Stanley too had his own happy thoughts born of Milly's gift; the gift and the act were but a trifle, yet 'trifles make the sum of human things.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE FATEFUL HOUR.

IN three days after this the well-known mansion in Park Lane was silent, shut up, and empty of all inmates, save the respectable old female who was left as custodian thereof. Brown holland covered everything; even the chandeliers were wreathed in bags, and statues looked spectral in their unwonted shrouds. The blinds were all down; the shrubs and flowers, with their huge majolica vases, removed from the balconies to the conservatory.

Ichabod! the glory had departed from Park Lane; yet Tom Seymour could not but come now and then to survey the place which had once been as an enchanted palace to him, and where he knew the very windows of the room that was Mabel's bed-chamber.

As he was not on Mrs. Allingham's visiting list, he could only hear of the Brookes at

secondhand through his friend Stanley—and more especially of Mabel, who was the constant correspondent of Milly; so to Tom Seymour the days—more especially those of office drudgery—stole monotonously, wearily, and anxiously on, and lover-like—circumstanced as he was—he tormented himself by fears and fancies that were not illumined by hope.

Who might be resident with her at Thanes-hurst now, ingratiating himself with her, and supplanting him in her heart with all the opportunities afforded by propinquity and residence in a country-house; backed perhaps by wealth and ‘expectations,’ and abetted, as he would then doubtless be, by her parents’ influence and authority? Would the memory of the delicious past time, in the same place, act as a charm to protect his love and keep his image in her mind? He could but hope so; yet this rival whom his imagination conjured up was a perpetual source of torment to poor Tom, more especially in the lonely evenings he spent in his dull rooms at the corner of Harley Street, more than half the houses

of which were closed for the season ; fate and fortune were, he felt, against a lover whose pockets were so thinly lined as his ; and in the present instance he had not ‘that limitless reversion in the *future*’ which is worth the mines of Golconda to the young and ardent.

Of Alfred Foxley, the cousin, who had also gone down to Thaneshurst, he had no fear whatever. He envied the apparently free-and-easy position in which his friend Stanley stood with Miss Allingham ; but marvelled that, with the many recommendations possessed by the latter—monetary ones especially—he seemed to make so little progress in his love affair with her ; but then, somewhat of a coquette as she was, Milly was in no haste to choose, or strike her colours to the gallant officer in question.

From Reynolds the Guardsman, Stanley one day heard incidentally that the Allinghams were on the eve of leaving town. He thought it strange that Milly should give this information to that tall personage with the tawny fly-away whiskers, and yet say nothing

on the subject to himself; however, he made up his mind to call at once.

The commissionaire on permanent duty at the club hailed a passing hansom, and Stanley was soon bowled up St. James's Street, along Piccadilly and Park Lane, and in due time found himself at Connaught Terrace. A resplendent footman, with a head like a cauliflower, was benignantly contemplating mankind at the portico of Mrs. Allingham's house, and from this official Stanley learned that the mamma was 'hout' and that Milly was at 'ome.'

'There is one fateful hour in every man's existence,' says a novelist; and while his heart began to beat quicker with anticipation, Rowland Stanley began to hope or to flatter himself that his hour had come *now*. He had not often such an opportunity as this.

'Is Miss Allingham alone?' he asked.

'Quite alone, sir,' responded 'Jeames,' preceding him; and now there flashed upon his mind the memory of another occasion, when he was on the point of declaring himself, and

putting his fate to the issue at once. It was at a whitebait dinner at Greenwich, when together they were on a balcony of the hotel, with none near, watching the passing ships and steamers gliding amid the strange combination of lurid light, gray mist, and purple shadow that mark a London twilight evening by the river, and he was on the point of telling her how dear she was to him—nay, had taken possession of her gloved hand; but after permitting it to linger for a little moment in his, she withdrew it, gathered her shawl about her, and stepped laughingly back into the drawing-room, so the golden chance was past and gone!

But an opportunity had come again, and even as he ascended the stately staircase, with all that rapidity of thought which enables us to form a fancied future, he cast up the general amount of his income, the statement he might have to give to ‘mamma,’ his ultimate expectations, his scheme for selling out, of quitting his beloved regiment, of taking a leaf out of *All for Love, or the World well Lost*, settling

down with Milly Allingham, and devoting his existence to her, and to her only.

So intently was she engaged with her own thoughts—it could scarcely be with her music, as she was only idling over the keys—that she did not hear his name announced; and through the double drawing-room he made his way unheard on the soft carpet and occasional bearskins, seeing himself reproduced again and again in the endless perspective of the gilt-framed pier-glasses that rose from marble console tables and chiffoniers, littered with Sèvres, Wedgwood, and ornaments of all kinds; and round the central table, where, of course ranged in regular order, lay elaborately bound tomes, photographic albums, silver baskets of calling cards, and gilded books, to be opened sometimes, but never perused—the usual features of that which some one describes as the ‘peculiar institution, the British drawing-room, that sacred chamber, ever tenderly swept and garnished and cared for.’

Stanley, unheard, the servant having withdrawn, came close to her back, as she was

seated on the music-stool, and for a moment he could admire, with all a lover's tenderness, the graceful contour of her neck and shapely head, and her wonderful coils of hair, of a brown so rich and dark, and yet so subtly shot with gold when the light struck them, that she almost seemed to have tresses of two colours at once. But if the girl a man loves is always beautiful in his eyes, how much more must she seem so when her loveliness is—as Milly's was—acknowledged by all, her own sex as well as the other!

Rapid though Stanley's survey was, he could perceive that a piece of music given by Reynolds—a piece with a tenderly significant title—was obnoxiously prominent on the piano; but then others of his presentation were littered all over it. Of course Miss Allingham had many more admirers than Captain Reynolds; and no man objects to it, but is rather pleased that the woman he loves obtains the admiration of others, such an expression being an approval of his own good taste; yet, somehow, Stanley had a decided dread of the influ-

ence of the Guardsman in the mansion at Hyde-park Corner.

Suddenly she became aware of his presence, gave a little start, and, while colouring for a moment, presented her hand, and said with a smile :

‘Captain Stanley! Where have you come from? Up through the floor, as the spiritualists send people?’

‘In by the door, in the usual orthodox way,’ replied Rowland Stanley, drawing a chair near her; ‘but I fear I have disturbed you.’

‘Oh, do not say so. I was only thinking, or idling over a piece of music,’ she replied, and with a rapid movement tossed Val Reynolds’s last gift into the music-stand, either out of carelessness for that personage or lest her visitor might see it.

‘Your mamma’s reception days are over now,’ said he after a brief pause.

‘For the season, yes; even the kettle-drums—the mildest of all forms of dissipation—are over now.’

‘But having heard that you were on the eve of leaving town, I ventured to call.’

‘Every one has left town now but ourselves. I am literally “the last rose of summer,”’ she replied, laughing. ‘Mamma is shopping, making some farewell purchases; she will be so disappointed on finding that she has missed you. But *who* told you that we were on the eve of departure?’

‘Reynolds of the Guards.’

‘Indeed! Yes, mamma goes with an aunt of mine to the Hôtel du Rhin at Wiesbaden, to imbibe the *kochbrunnen*; I to the Brookes’ down in Sussex, for a pretty long visit.’

‘Then probably this is the last time I shall have the pleasure of seeing you.’

‘Till we return to town. We leave this in a few days.’

‘So soon! When you return to town, Miss Allingham, I shall of course have joined my regiment abroad.’

The girl’s long dark lashes drooped, and then she gazed at him with something of interest in her hazel eyes.

‘Abroad?’ she repeated, and there was much that was musical and plaintive in her voice as she spoke.

‘Yes; so Heaven knows when—if ever—we may meet again; so I have that to say which must be said now—now, that we are on the eve of what may be more than a temporary separation.’

His lips trembled, his eyes were sparkling, and his heart beating fast; but he paused even then, for something in the girl’s serenity, her air, or assumed air, of pride, contrasted with his own emotion and loving tenderness, made him linger in the declaration of the sentiment she had inspired. After a little pause, during which he could see how her heart palpitated beneath her silk dress, he laid a hand softly upon hers, and said, in a low voice and with his lips very near her pearly ear:

‘You—you know that I love you!’

‘I do not know anything of the kind, Captain Stanley,’ replied the wilful beauty, looking down, however, and leaving her hand where it lingered on the keys of the piano.

‘Milly, dearest Milly—oh, permit me to call you so!’ he urged, and now his breath was on her cheek.

‘‘Captain Stanley,’’ she replied, ‘please not to carry flirtation too far.’

‘Flirtation!’ he exclaimed almost impatiently, while to hide her smile of pleasure she buried her pretty nose in a bouquet of camellias and lily of the valley that lay near in a charming *bouquetière*, the gift of Stanley, with a bouquet, one night before a ball. ‘Oh,’ he continued, ‘have I deceived myself? Can you—have you been unconscious of all this, of how deeply I love you?’

In her heart of hearts Milly Allingham had seen his growing passion, and felt a real pleasure in his society, but had sedulously hidden her secret pride thereat; and, almost unconscious of her own coquetry, her vanity was piqued by the long delay of the avowal that had come now. Thus she was unwilling to surrender on too easy terms; or, perhaps, could it be that she was like an angler, anxious to play a little with her fish ere she landed



him; or that she had another string to her bow, and knew not her own mind? Any way she paused, and Stanley repeated in a more agitated voice:

‘Can you have been unconscious of how deeply I love you?’

Prompted by motives best known to herself, keeping her beautiful face half averted, and showing him only her clearly cut profile, she answered in a low voice:

‘I certainly never dreamed that you had a deep feeling on the subject; and—and you red-coats have such a facility for such emotions. I thought you—you—’

‘What?’

‘Valued me as a friend, nothing more.’

Some strange idiosyncrasy of the heart led her to trifle with him and with her own happiness. Stanley sighed, and said:

‘Oh, Miss Allingham! your society has ever been delightful to me; but—’

‘Please let us be friends. Many love, and love truly; but many more only fancy they have fallen in love, and the fancy does not

outlast separation from the object—separation for any length of time. We can be excellent friends, can't we?' she added, looking up at him for a second with a timid but coquettish smile.

Stanley had risen now, and looking down at her stately head, with its straight snow-white division, he thought sadly :

'Is she heartless, or merely equivocating with me ?'

Then he added aloud :

'A friend of yours ! a mere cold friend I could never, never be. I must be something nearer and dearer. I must be all, or nothing !'

She was only waiting, perhaps, to hear him say passionately again how much he loved her, as doubtless the repetition thereof was pleasing alike to her ear and her vanity ; but in this she was doomed to be disappointed ; for, just as Stanley was about to speak again, the door of the room swung noiselessly open, and the tall footman with the powdered hair, bearing certain cards, solemnly and portentously, on a silver salver, announced some

visitors, whose silken dresses were already rustling on the threshold. So Stanley was compelled to retire, leaving the citadel untaken, and assuming his hat and cane, bade her sadly, reproachfully, and even hastily, farewell.

She rang the bell, and he bowed himself out.

He issued into the brilliant sunshine, passed the Marble Arch, and entered the Park with a vague sense of being ill-treated or of having acted foolishly; but how, he knew not exactly. He had not been abrupt or impetuous, yet he had been refused, and not even referred to her mother. The whole love scene had taken a turn, and been in its tone quite unlike what he could have anticipated, and he knew not whether to thank or maledict the sudden irruption of those fair visitors whose arrival prevented a continuance of it.

So Stanley's *fateful hour* had not yet come.

While he was sauntering moodily onward she was concealing her real agitation by talking gaily to her friend Fanny Conyers and

others, on topics far removed from her heart, while she whispered to herself, with a bright and triumphant smile :

‘He will come again ere we go, and *then* I may give him some hope.’

But Milly Allingham was wrong ; for Rowland Stanley went near Connaught Terrace no more ; and a few days after the stately mansion there was, like all the rest, shut up, abandoned to brown holland and cobwebs. After she and her mamma had left town, he thought he had obtained a clue to the whole affair, and to the secret emotions which influenced her while listening to his declaration.

One day, when idling over the papers at the club, and pondering how aimless his life in London had now become, he overheard one officer say to another :

‘So Val Reynolds has gone on leave and run down to Sussex—to some place beyond Brighton at least—for some weeks.’

‘Indeed !’ replied the other, not much interested in the subject.

‘He spoke of the Brighton Harriers, but

Foxley told me there is a bit of muslin in the case.'

'Ah—perhaps.'

'He was more particular in his choice of gloves in Regent Street, and pots and bottles of all kinds of things at Rimmel's, the day before he went. Some of the Blues quizzed him openly, as he is known to be awfully spoony on Milly Allingham, who is residing near Brighton.'

'She is no end of a nice little party, the Brooke girl,' said the other, becoming a little interested, 'but not equal to Milly Allingham ; but then her mother spoils all, by showing her cards so plainly.'

'How ?'

'Don't you know?—tuft-hunting to death. She pays profound homage to the peerage, though she despises the Law List—perhaps the Army List in general too. And so Val, you think, has gone after *la belle* Allingham ?'

'Yes ; the Brookes' invitation to her included him, I understand. But with all his

recommendation Reynolds makes little way with some women.'

'Why?'

'He can only talk Four-in-Hand Club, and dilate largely on bars and bits, of patent axles and ditto drags, and laugh immensely at any fellow who pulls up his team with both hands.'

But here Stanley, unwilling to listen to more, took his hat, and, buttoning his gloves as carefully as if he had nothing serious to reflect on, issued into the now-deserted thoroughfare of Pall Mall, where little more was to be seen save the dust whirling, and the sentinels of the Guards standing motionless on their posts, with 'ordered arms.'

'Brookes' invitation to her included *him*?' thought Stanley. 'Neither said anything of this to *me*.'

A pang of jealousy, with something of bitterness, of wounded self-esteem and anger for supposed duplicity, shot through his heart. Was there a secret understanding between them? The whole affair wore a disgusting

aspect of prearrangement. That Miss Allingham did not speak of Reynolds going down to Thaneshurst was perhaps an omission; perhaps she thought or cared too little about the matter to mention it; but it might also be that she was too well-bred, too coquettish, or—shall we say it?—too cunning to pain *him*, Rowland Stanley; or perhaps—and this was the most stinging thought of all—she might really care for the legged ‘curled darling.’

Ay, there was the rub. So Stanley gave a sigh like a snort, and muttered,

‘Well, it is all for the best, as Dr. Pangloss has it; but just now the wrench is devilish hard to bear. By Jove, I’ll cut London, resign my leave, and rejoin!’

But he did not do this, for reasons to be given shortly: not that he cared much about the mess-table speculation of a man having twelve months’ leave, after long foreign service, foregoing at least five or six of them.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT OCCURRED AT 'THE RAG.'

THE month of August in London, there the hottest, most breathless, and detestable of all the months in the year, stole on, and found Rowland Stanley still lingering irresolutely in town, doubtful whether to rejoin or take a run over to Paris. The West-end was intensely dull ; still he preferred it to the country, after his long residence among some of the outlying hill-stations in India. Even the theatres were cheerless now. The railways failed to fill them, and the dress-circles presented 'a beggarly account of empty boxes.'

In short, London was out of town.

'I must cut this stupid objectless life,' thought Stanley; 'I'll rush off somewhere, or rejoin. By Jove! but for what those gossiping fellows at the club said about Val Rey-

nolds, I would go down to Brighton, where I might have some chance of seeing her on a fête-day. And only to think that devilish fellow has been with her at Thaneshurst all this time.'

August! Milly Allingham had left town in July. By this period, what other interests than his might surround her now, to the oblivion of his image and memory perhaps!

Stanley had loved the girl from the time he first saw her; but with her strange caprice and coquetry he sometimes asked himself *why* he did so? And he was questioning himself thus now, even while collaterally, in his own mind, recalling and dwelling fondly and sadly over every word that had passed between them.

In six or seven weeks, he surmised, could she have reached the apathy, the indifference, that so often follow separation? and something of rage gathered in his heart at this idea, combined with his suspicion of a secret understanding. For often does love, or so-called love, come to this, when without the

magnetic influence of presence and propinquity. If she remembered him, would she care to surmise—but she was too proud to do so—whether he thought of *her*? Often he had heard her say, laughingly, that the memories of men, in matters pertaining to love, were wonderfully short—an accusation against the sex which he as laughingly, but for obvious reasons more earnestly, combated.

At times it seemed painfully plain to an unostentatious fellow like Rowland Stanley that Milly Allingham, the haughty and wealthy beauty, who shot her arrows so deftly and posed herself so gracefully at archery meetings—who was the belle of the best London ball-rooms, the talk of the season, the admired and looked-for in the Row and elsewhere—who had been presented at court—who shone in the croquet-ground, and actually hunted on a thoroughbred—was much more likely, after all, to prefer the languid, die-away, tawny-whiskered Guardsman, to one like himself; and so, as he thought over his situation, he muttered,

'What a romantic—yes, sentimental—idiot I was to ask her for the flower after the Brookes' ball; and to prize so much the rose-bud and the—what was it?—bunch of forget-me-nots she gave me next day in the Park! On the very verge of proposing, too, when last I saw her!'

These ideas came to him in his bitter moments, for it was

'his jealousy's peculiar nature
To swell small things to great; nay, out of naught
To conjure much; and then to lose its reason
Amid the hideous phantoms it had formed.'

And thus he conjured much. That Reynolds's invitation to Thaneshurst was due to Mrs. Brooke's particular and ulterior views and his own great 'expectations,' Stanley knew very well; but it was the concealment of it from himself by Milly Allingham that rankled in his heart, though he had no decided claim as yet to be in her confidence. From what motion did that concealment spring? he asked himself a thousand times, without finding any satisfactory solution of the mystery.

So every way Stanley felt town becoming more intolerable: like the jealous Moor, he found his 'occupation gone.' There was no more escorting Mrs. Allingham and her daughter to balls and evening parties, to flower-shows at the Horticultural, to the International Exhibition, or fêtes at the Botanic Gardens and elsewhere. All was ended now, and blank monotony had fallen over him apparently; and in this mood he found himself promenading one evening in Regent Street, when he suddenly came upon his friend Tom Seymour.

The office of the latter was a Government one; certain returns had been moved for in 'the House,' and in the making up of these he had been occupied in other work than reading periodicals and smoking cigars during office-hours; and thus Stanley had not seen him for some time.

After a few of the usual commonplaces Stanley asked Tom if he had heard anything of the Brookes.

'No; have you?' asked the other eagerly.

'Only that Milly Allingham has gone to visit them, while her mater is imbibing the kochbrunnen at Wiesbaden,' replied Stanley, and then changed the subject, as he had no desire to impart, even to his firm friend, the 'snub'—for such he deemed it—he had received from Milly, and too sincerely mortified to say aught of the cloudy-looking affair of Reynolds being invited at the same time to the same house.

'They will make a long stay at Thanes-hurst, I fear,' said Seymour, unwilling to let the matter nearest his heart be dismissed so summarily; and there was something of sadness or weariness in his tone that impressed his military friend.

'Now, Tom, old fellow,' said the latter, 'you are down in the mouth just now about Mabel Brooke. You'll dine with me this evening?'

'With pleasure; but where?'

'At my club. I sha'n't be there long now; I mean to rejoin the regiment.'

'Leave up already?'

‘Not half run.’

‘Why—oh, I see! Milly Allingham is out of town, so London has lost its charm. It has so for me too.’

‘Come, then, we’ll just have a cutlet or so, a bottle of Lafitte after, and then go somewhere and make a night of it.’

‘Thanks, Rowland. Anywhere — much less your luxurious club — is preferable to that odious boarding-house by Harley Street.’

And they turned arm-in-arm down Pall-Mall way, little foreseeing the direction their affairs would take at the club, where they were soon seated at table in the snug corner of a stately room. A gorgeous footman, resplendent with buttons, removed the silver lid of the soup-tureen, and Stanley pushed the *menu* to his friend. ‘A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind;’ but though the captain and Seymour had not much to say on any subject save one, as their minds were at Thaneshurst, and on that subject they could not converse until their attendant’s services were dispensed with, haste was made to get

through the 'cutlet,' &c., and have the cloth removed.

'Port or claret, Tom?

'Claret, please. And so where shall we go for the evening?'

'Haymarket? Sothern is there as Dun-dreary, of course? Or shall we go and see Foxley's friend, little Aimée de Bohun, pirouetting on her toes at the—'

'No; Foxley is sure to be in a private box, and I detest the sight of the fellow's face,' exclaimed Seymour.

'Letter for you, sir,' said the servant, holding a salver before Stanley, who leisurely took therefrom a letter, the postmark on which made him start and change countenance.

'Lewes and Brighton, by Jove!' he exclaimed; 'and addressed in a lady's hand too.'

'A lady's!' repeated Seymour, suddenly becoming similarly interested.

'Yes. See, it must be so.'

'Mabel's!' exclaimed Seymour, his colour deepening more than the Lafitte warranted.

‘You know it, I perceive.’

‘Open it, Rowland—I am all impatience.’

Stanley opened it carefully with his fruit-knife, and a little nervously he drew the missive from its envelope. It *was* from Miss Brooke; and her tinted letter-paper, redolent of some subtle perfume, was a rare work of heraldic art, so far as arms, monogram, and so forth went.

‘What on earth can she be writing to *you* about, Stanley?’ asked Tom as he saw an expression of pleasure spread over the face of his friend, who read aloud thus:

‘Thaneshurst, Sussex.

‘Dear Captain Stanley,—I write to you by desire of papa, as his hand is gouty, and Alf has delayed so long to do so, though more than once requested. The grouse are not so plentiful this month; but papa, though no shot himself, says that there is an excellent prospect for the partridge-shooting, and that if you can visit us in time for the 1st of September, we shall all be delighted to see you.

'We are not so gay just now as we sometimes are; but we contrive to get through the time wonderfully—Milly, Fanny Conyers, and some other girls, with our escorts, Alf and Captain Reynolds.'

'Is *he* there?' asked Seymour, interrupting.

'So it would seem,' replied Stanley, as if he had only then learned the whereabouts of this tall bugbear to them both.

'That must have been the old lady's doings.'

'Of course. He'll be a peer one of these days.'

'We have carpet-dances,' continued Stanley, resuming the letter, 'and music every evening, and sometimes private theatricals and charades. We were all at a great musical party, which proved very jolly, as we had previously been bored by a lecture on Africa by a mild clerico, our new curate, who seems to have eyes for no one save Milly, but he may as well admire the moon. She is quite the rage with the Hussars at Brighton. They

gave us a ball last week, and we danced every dance, and in the sets of sixteen Lancers. Captain Reynolds quite shook off his aristocratic languor, and became our commanding officer for the time. It was delightful: we all laughed so, and wished you were there.'

'No regret for poor me!' sighed Tom.

'We often drive to Brighton, and skate there on the rink with cousin Alf and Major Larkspur of the Hussars. But you must join us in all these mild amusements, if you are not otherwise engaged.

'Pater and mater join me in kindest regards, and believe me to be yours very sincerely,

MABEL BROOKE.'

'And that is all?' exclaimed Tom.

'There is a P.S.: "Papa desires me to add that if Mr. Thomas Seymour (who is the son of one of his oldest friends) can obtain leave from his official duties, he"—(the word had at first been *we*)—"shall only be too happy if he can accompany you."



Seymour's face grew suddenly very bright and joyous, while an emotion of gladness filled his heart; yet he only said,

'How kind! But he is a fine fellow, old Mr. Brooke.'

Mabel, circumstanced as they were, could not write to Seymour even such a girlish and light-hearted letter as this, though she might do so with confidence to his friend, knowing well that her letter would be shown. Indeed, it was at her suggestion the invitation was given to Stanley when her father was alone, in the hope—which was fulfilled—that, by the association of ideas, it would be extended to his friend.

'You are going, of course, Tom?' said Stanley.

'Doubtless; shall only be too happy. And you?'

There was somewhat of a dark and dubious expression hovering on Stanley's handsome face. He was thinking:

'To go down there, and find perhaps that after all—*after all*—she has fooled me, and

thrown me over for that fellow Val Reynolds —no, I'll be — if I go !'

And yet the next breath found him considering the terms in which he should express his pleasure in accepting Mr. Brooke's invitation.

But with all his love for Milly, he was not without an emotion of anger at her pride and coquetry. Thus one moment he was prompted to show his indifference of her society by pleading other engagements, and the next felt only too glad to avail himself of the opportunity of once more enjoying and tormenting himself in it.

Poor Tom looked longingly at the letter of Mabel; *her* hand had written, touched, folded, and closed it—the lovely little hand whose contour he knew so well—and something of this was read in his face by Stanley, who said,

‘There, Tom, is the letter; I know you wish to preserve it as a relic. What idiots we fellows are !’

“Is love so small a thing in comparison with money?” asks Mrs. Norton.”

'Yes, at times, Tom—a very small thing indeed.'

Seymour smiled somewhat bitterly, and said,

'So cousin Alf delayed—that means, no doubt, declined—to write an invitation which was perhaps intended to include *me*.'

'Doubtless. But don't think of him; you could easily turn his flank. I would that I had in Miss Allingham's heart the same amount of interest you possess in that of her friend.'

'And that I had the same monetary advantages that you have to recommend you, Stanley.'

'Milly sets no store on these. Can you get leave from your commanding officer?'

'Our comptroller? Oh, yes; the returns are finished, and I have fairly earned it.'

'Good. Then I'll write by an early post to-morrow, and accept for us both. Mean-time, we'll have another bottle of Lafitte.'

Seymour was quite elated, as his mind went back to the delights of his first visit to

Thaneshurst; but he knew well — he had learned intuitively of old—that however warm and genuine his welcome from cheery old Mr. Brooke would be, that of Mrs. Brooke would be accorded most unwillingly. With all his efforts he could never win her favour, and had ceased to hope for it or make further attempts.

Yet the temptation to be once again near her he loved rendered him oblivious, case-hardened, and almost totally indifferent to what her mother thought; so he resolved the moment he reached his rooms to write also an acceptance to Mr. Brooke.

Thus they got through the night pleasantly without going anywhere—even to see Aimée de Bohun, the fair one with the golden locks, in tarlatan and spangles.



CHAPTER VI.

THANESHURST.

THOUGH situated amid a portion of Sussex scenery where the landscape is broken into hill and dale, and for the most part covered with birch, hazel, or beech underwood, Thaneshurst is still within view of that restless sea which is for ever rolling between the white bluffs of Beachy Head and the peninsula of Selsea Bill.

Thaneshurst!—the ancient sound of the name pleased the vanity of Mrs. John Brooke when the place was purchased; but, somewhat to her disappointment, instead of being a baronial pile like Lewes or Rochester, the mansion was a villa, more modern than scores of houses in the Tottenham-court Road.

The new and stately villa, with its entablature, pilasters, and balustraded roof, its plate-glass windows and Italian *porte-cochère*

of three arches, all in the approved Tuscan style, in summer was half buried among the grand woods of an older dwelling it had replaced ; and amid its gardens, shrubberies, parterres, and the old chase, ‘the eternal loveliness of nature was around it.’

The ground descended from the house in terraced slopes, adorned with beds of brilliant flowers ; and there of old, on the summit of the gentle eminence, stood the wooden dwelling of Brictric, the Saxon thane, who was also lord of Thaneland, the gift of Harold, by whose side he fell at Hastings ; and there, in later years, stood a Norman castle, granted, with other manors in Sussex, to Anne of Cleves,—a fortlet whose occupants, in their brightest dreams, could have had no thought of the staircase of coloured marble, the rails and lamps of light Venetian bronze, picked out with gilding ; the statues, in the best style of art, in handsome niches ; the rare exotics in *jardinières* or majolica vases on tripod stands, and other appurtenances, which made a palace of the Thaneshurst of Mrs. John Brooke.

And as at Park Lane the demi-sea-horse, with the motto '*Spes mea Deus*,' was conspicuous on everything, from the hall-chairs to the pediment above the *porte-cochère*, yet it was a house where scarcely-appreciated Titians, Raphaels, Correggios, and Watteaus replaced the simple chromos and oleographs with which Mrs. John Brooke had been contented in less ambitious days; when their town abode was far eastward of Park Lane; when a month of the sea-breeze at Margate was all then dreamed of summer, and 'her John' came always down by 'the husbands' boat.'

Something of his business habits and strict regularity pervaded the household at Thaneshurst, and everything was ordered there as if by clockwork. The house-bell, clanged by Mr. Mulbery, the solemn butler, summoned all from bed inexorably at a certain hour—too inexorably Mabel and her friends conceived, if they had come but a short time before from a ball. A second rang for prayers, a third for breakfast, and so on; and, under

Mr. Brooke's *régime*, none dared to be laggard.

'Loving-kindness is greater than laws,' saith the Hebrews, 'and the charities of life more than all ceremonies.' Thus, with all the forms observed at Thaneshurst, it was a kindly and hospitable household, in which at times, especially about Christmas-tide, much of old-fashioned jollity mingled with the refinement of a modern country mansion.

The most pleasant feature in the hospitality of Thaneshurst was, that visitors there did just as they chose. The scenery for miles round, with its chalky formations called downs, its open hills with fresh verdure and hollow combs, was beautiful. The stables had plenty of horse-flesh, and the coach-houses supplied every kind of vehicle, from the stately carriage with its hammer-cloth, and the 'bus that took the servants to church, down to the little basket phaeton, with its white ponies, in which Mabel, with one of her friends, took many a summer drive.

And more than once it had been declared

at the Hussar mess that for what some one calls 'a thorough-going cross-country flirtation, by Jove, there is no place like old Brooke's at Thaneshurst!'

Pupkins, in irreproachable livery, met Stanley and Seymour at the Lewes station, and in a smart bang-up trap conveyed them, their portmanteaus and gun-cases, along the chalky highway, off which they, after a few miles' drive, turned down the avenue that led to Thaneshurst; and as they passed a glade in the sunshiny grounds, Stanley's quick, and perhaps too readily suspicious, eye saw Captain Reynolds, in an accurate morning costume, though in the country, with Milly Allingham, walking slowly—Stanley thought 'a deuced deal too slowly'—towards the house.

He was bending towards her; and as he spoke her eyes were cast downward, and with a quick hand she was twirling the parasol that rested on her right shoulder: thus Stanley could see that she was smiling brightly. Seymour, who was gazing intently in another

direction, did not observe them ; and some secret emotion made his friend keep silent on the subject of his own mortification.

‘How long have they been together? How often are they together thus? On what terms are they?’ thought he. ‘How long has *this sort of thing* been going on? Fool that I was to come here, only to be tortured by what I may see or suspect!’

Another minute or so, and the trap was pulled up under the *porte-cochère*, where Mr. Mulbery and two tall footmen were in waiting. Mr. and Mrs. Brooke had driven in the carriage to Pyecombe ; the young ladies were all in the grounds ; the dinner-bell would be rung in an hour. Meantime he would show them their rooms, and send up wine.

The chance information that ‘the young ladies were *all* in the grounds,’ afforded some little consolation to Stanley ; but wherever they were, none were near Milly Allingham and Reynolds,—they, at least, had their *tête-à-tête* promenade to themselves.

Stanley drained a bumper of sherry, as if

to drown his sense of annoyance; and, after his 'traps' had been unpacked, proceeded to make a more than usually elaborate evening toilet, muttering, as he rasped away at his thick brown hair with a couple of ivory-handled brushes,

'What the devil is the use? It is perhaps all over now, and I should not have come here. However, I can easily get the adjutant, or some fellow at the Rag, to telegraph for me on urgent business, if I find the necessity of hooking it, and leaving the Guards in possession of the field.'

And in this mood of mind he leisurely descended to the drawing-room, after the first or warning bell had rung for dinner; and Seymour, who had heard him descend, and had a comical half-dread of encountering Mrs. Brooke alone, hurried after him; and the modulated hum of female voices announced that the ladies had already assembled and were awaiting them.

When Seymour entered the room, to his

infinite relief Mrs. Brooke was not yet there; but Mabel was.

For some time past the whole thought of the latter had been, that Tom Seymour was actually coming again to Thaneshurst—very soon. In an hour he would be here! How would he, how should she, comport themselves under the vigilance to which they would be subjected? Poor Mabel felt now that quickening and fullness of the heart which a timid actress may feel before the rising of the act-drop, when an impatient and critical 'house' sits beyond it.

In this instance 'the house' was mamma.



CHAPTER VII.

THE PROGRESS OF TRUE LOVE, ETC.

AMID the usual greetings and commonplaces, the inevitable discussion concerning the weather, and Mabel's apologies for the absence of Mr. and Mrs. Brooke, Milly's account of her mother's health at Wiesbaden, the prospects of sport on the coming 1st, and so forth, our four chief friends failed to conceal from each other a certain nervousness of manner, and a tendency to talk rapidly, and to invest trifles with a sound of importance they scarcely merited.

Milly Allingham could not repress a blush on seeing Stanley, when she recalled their last interview and farewell in London. She could not forget that he had made her a declaration of love most tenderly and earnestly, and that she had—Heaven alone knew why—met it mockingly, even while longing and fully ex-

pecting to hear it made again. She could not doubt that he had gladly accepted the invitation to Thaneshurst, and come hither to cast himself once more in her way. One moment she felt flattered by this idea, and the next found all her too-ready pride alarmed, lest he should imagine that *she* had some influence in procuring the invitation so accorded.

And so, with every-day commonplaces on their lips, each of the two friends looked upon the face which, in the love of his heart, made all other beauty seem plain, and over which that passion cast a halo, as it were, of divinity.

There was a shy smile of fondness—but every smile of hers was a caress—in the love-lit eyes of Mabel Brooke that made the heart of Seymour dance, when again he felt in his the pressure of her little hand—‘the link between him and happiness, which to surrender, never to clasp again, would be simply the blank and bitterness of death.’

Meanwhile Stanley was surmising whether Milly was pleased that he had come: her vanity

was certain to be. Was she annoyed that he had seen her promenading alone with Reynolds, instead of some other man? Stanley found an answer to these silent questions impossible; but there was a serene hauteur in her bearing that was born of the very suspicion that her actions were under supervision or control by him.

‘Ha, Stanley, glad to see you again!’ said Reynolds cordially, as he came loungingly towards the new-comers in full dinner costume. ‘We thought you would have turned up on the 7th of the month. Miss Allingham assured us that she was certain you would do so.’

‘On the 7th?’ repeated Stanley, perplexed, and still more so to see the colour deepening with annoyance in the face of Milly.

‘It was the last Brighton race-day,’ explained Reynolds; ‘I had my drag and team down from town.’

‘It was a delightful day,’ said Mabel to Seymour; ‘the course was crowded. From the downs we had a charming view of the sea; and when the races were over, we had luncheon

in the Hussar mess-room, “by invitation from Major Larkspur.”

‘She had been thinking of me, then, at least,’ thought Stanley—‘perhaps longing for me! Was the chance expectation inspired by the wish? and were some of those Hussars a counterfoil to Reynolds?’

But the face of Milly answered none of those questions; however, her usually serene expression was somewhat gone. She was looking more annoyed than ever, and there was actually an angry curl on her lovely lip. The Guardsman’s remark had proved, somehow, a blunder.

They were now joined by Alfred Foxley, who came, redolent of brandy-and-water and cigar-smoke, from the billiard-room, where he had been playing one hand against the other, or practising cannons; and whatever were the real emotions that inspired him towards Seymour, he had the good grace to welcome him as warmly as he did Stanley. And now the conversation became more easy and general; but in spite of himself a sense of constraint, of



vague indignation, stole over Stanley, and he found himself, during the dull time that always precedes a somewhat formal dinner, talking more to Miss Conyers and other ladies than to her who, for months past, had never been absent from his mind—the first thought in the morning and the last at night.

‘Can it be,’ he sometimes asked himself, ‘that she cares neither for me nor any other man so much as the visible conquest? By Jove! I shall be pretty sure of my ground, and have some solid data to go upon, ere I make a fool of myself *again* with her, or any other woman!'

Mr. and Mrs. Brooke now arrived, within a few minutes of each other. As for the latter, the sample we have given of her advice to Mabel on the night of their last ball concerning Captain Reynolds, and so forth, may serve as an epitome of the general tone and phase of her character, and may explain why her greeting of Seymour, though perfectly well bred, was far from ‘gushing.’ Her husband welcomed both guests with equal warmth, but if

there was any difference, perhaps it was in Tom's favour.

Mr. Brooke was always more cheery even in the country than in town, and never looked so old as his years,—he was so hearty, healthy, and rubicund, with merry blue eyes, well-preserved teeth, and a pate that shone like a billiard-ball; and now, as usual, he was dressed for the evening scrupulously in black, with a stiff white cravat and angular collar, and shaven to a nicety, with his silver hair brushed up in two sharp peaks, one over each ear.

‘Welcome to Thaneshurst, Captain Stanley!’ said he; ‘and welcome too, Tom; but it is not your first visit, and I hope it won’t be the last by many,’ he added, taking Seymour prisoner by the watch-chain, and drawing him into an oriel. ‘Lord, Lord, Tom!’ he added, ‘how like your father you *do* grow every day as you get older! You quite remind me of the time when he and I used to hob-nob over our pints of bitter and a chop at the Three Snipes in Cheapside, and thought it so jolly to get a pit-order for the theatre or a night at

Cremorne; or when we got a holiday, Tom, and took our sisters—and quite as often other folks' sisters—to tea and shrimps and the contemplation of river scenery from the back windows of the Jackdaw at Gravesend,—proud of cheap cigars, and voting a clay-pipe, especially a yard of it, vulgar. My eye! what fun we used to have! Nothing like it now, Tom, I often think.'

These and suchlike reminiscences were gall and wormwood and intense vexation of spirit to Mrs. Brooke; so she verily hated Tom Seymour for his alleged likeness to his father—though he had been the groomsman at her marriage—and for the memories he revived in the old man's mind; and now she was still further irritated to perceive the slightly-elevated eyebrows and mildly-amused expression of the magnificent Reynolds, whom she sought to engage in conversation.

Poor Mr. Brooke had no share either in her false pride or secret ambition, and occasionally felt now that he 'took out' in fashion and show much that he had lost of fun, free.

dom, and jollity in the old times that could come no more. He looked timidly towards his better half, fearing that he had said something he should not have said, and then glanced at the ormolu clock on the blue velvet-fringed mantelpiece, and saw that dinner would be served in five minutes now.

Assuming the most calm and casual tone he could command, after a few remarks about the emptiness, the heat, and dust of London, Stanley, while bending over Miss Allingham's chair, said,

‘ You did not mention, when last I had the pleasure of seeing you, that our—that my friend Reynolds was to be here.’

She coloured slightly for a second, and replied,

‘ I was on the point of doing so—it was so natural among mutual friends, when I was about to visit the same house; but we were interrupted by visitors, you remember.’

He was not likely to forget, as their unwelcome arrival interrupted more important matter than information about the tall Guards-



man's movements. It might really be the case, as she said, that no concealment had been intended in the matter ; but while she felt angrily that it was implied, the calmness and perfect composure with which she referred smilingly to a scene that might have ended very differently ruffled and piqued Stanley now, and he again withdrew to the side of Miss Conyers.

Seymour was watching them narrowly, and thought to himself, 'Somehow, these two never will get on.'

He liked Milly and admired her, of course, though her mother, from whom she inherited her troublesome pride and hauteur, had once given him an affront, which—though to Milly unknown—he never forgot. In a sudden burst of effusion, when handing her to her carriage at the Brookes' door, she had once invited him to call at Connaught Terrace, but omitted to give his name to the Cerberus in a long coat with gilt buttons, who sat in the hall chair and had supervision of her visiting-list ; and who, on Tom handing him his card,

carefully scanned the said document from top to bottom, and then from bottom to top, through more than two hundred names, after which he said solemnly,

‘Sir, Mrs. Allingham is *not* at home.’

‘Not at home to *me*—that, I suppose, is the right reading of it,’ thought Tom, as he turned in rather a vicious frame of mind into the Edgware Road. ‘Why the deuce did the old woman ask me to call?’ he added, never supposing in his simplicity that she had dismissed the general invitation from her mind the moment it was given. So much for hazy West-end hospitality. He felt thankful as he gazed at Mabel that no such affront had ever been put upon him, even by Mrs. Brooke. However, he was yet to learn of what that good lady was capable when roused.

Mabel and he had fallen in love with each other, if not ‘at first sight,’ to use a very hackneyed expression, at least very soon after, and that love had ripened fast amid the partial seclusion and opportunities afforded by such a country house as Thaneshurst; and hence

their intimacy became 'a method of establishing a preference which is intelligible to some,' says Mrs. Norton, 'but which nevertheless asserts its triumphant claim to be as good a method as any other, by some happy union which proves that the suddenness of the choice was no bar to constancy, nor evidence of shallowness.'

And while this unavowed love was growing in his heart, he little knew how often Mrs. Brooke had said to her husband,

'That young man should not be here: he is not in our *set*.'

As for Mr. Brooke, he did not and would not see all this. If the young folks liked each other's society, why shouldn't they? He never troubled himself about the matter, though Mrs. Brooke *did*. He found young Tom Seymour an agreeable addition to his family circle; he could speak about business generally, was 'up' in the 'money article,' and knew many other things that were to the Guardsman, and even Stanley, things mysterious and unknown; and his calculations went no further.

At last the gong sounded like distant thunder in the lower regions, and the company filed off, Mr. Brooke leading the way with the vicar, Stanley pairing off with little Miss Conyers, Milly with Reynolds, and Mabel with some one else—not Tom, however, her mamma took care of that; and the great meal of the day, or the evening after, was served up in due solemnity and state.

It seemed, however, to Stanley that Reynolds had offered his arm to Miss Allingham very much as if it were a matter of course or use and wont. Was it all an understood thing? To Miss Conyers, we fear, he was not very attentive, though he strove to be so, for his thoughts had taken more than ever the turn of self-torment; and when under that process it is astonishing how ingenious and creative we can be.

Whatever might be the thoughts or aspirations of some of those present, especially those in whom we hope to interest the reader, the dinner passed like any other. Mrs. Brooke was ~~other~~ vain of her *cuisine*; thus it was perfect



in all its component parts, from the Victoria soup, over which the vicar intoned the grace, and the *vol-au-vent à la financière*, the *entrées* and more solid dishes, to the *éclairs à la frangipane de vanille*, and the fruit from the vineries and hothouses of Thaneshurst, whose superintendent, Mr. Digory Digweed, was celebrated over all that district for his grapes.

It was a dinner to which even lovers might do justice, and at which the eminently respectable-looking Mr. Mulbery superintended the due libations of wine.

Not being a sportsman, Mr. Brooke cared little about the prospects of the 1st, and would not join Reynolds and Stanley in their condemnation of reaping-machines, which shaved the fields close and bare, leaving nothing of the high stubble so much affected by the sportsmen of other days, when a good shot was deemed the man who could pick out the *old* birds from a covey and kill them right off; and though Foxley felt almost inclined to swear at the news, Mr. Brooke heard with perfect equanimity that poachers had been

laying snares, and drawing fields with nets, laying night-lines in the reservoirs elsewhere ; and that one, when captured on 'a shiny night,' had the hardihood to tell the vicar on the bench that he only 'picked up' the hare which was found in his possession.

The vicar and the village lawyer failed alike to interest when they talked of parish rates and the income-tax, of Ritualism and the erection of a reredos in a neighbouring church ; and our friends, though they talked fluently enough on them all, found the discussions on the coming 1st, on rink skating at Ryde or Brighton, or the anticipated pleasures of a riding party on the morrow with the young ladies, more consonant to their tastes.

So far as the 1st of September was concerned, Tom Seymour was not fated to make 'a good bag,' or even fire a shot, as events that could be little foreseen intervened.

Dinner past, after briefly lingering over their wine and coffee, the ladies were rejoined by the gentlemen in the drawing-room. Al-

ready the piano was open, and amid the intervals occupied by Balfe and Rossini, Beethoven and Mendelssohn, and while the vicar closely engaged Mrs. Brooke in some matter of local interest, Tom drew near Mabel, though Stanley, with his eyes wandering ever and anon after Milly Allingham, seemed to devote himself to Miss Conyers.

‘He that cannot dissemble in love is not worthy to live,’ according to Lillie’s *Euphues*. This is rather a severe fiat; yet much dissembling is often necessary. Denied by the strict surveillance of her mother, and the jealous watchfulness of her cousin Foxley, the joy of even talking often to each other—Mabel and Seymour—they could at least exchange those stolen glances which, as Byron tells us truly, are the ‘sweeter for the theft.’ Of these no watchfulness could deprive them; so love thrrove in silence, and many small and petty details there were, to be conned over by each fondly when apart; for, says a casuist, ‘the taste for stratagem, the little wiles and snares inspired by a first passion, are among

the strongest incentives to its origin,' and he might have added its permanence.

'I am so glad we have you here again, Mr. Seymour,' said Mabel quite openly in her mother's hearing,—'glad for selfish reasons. Papa never plays billiards now, and he gets so cross, the dear old thing, when he has bad hands at long whist.' What this had to do with Tom's visit was not very clear; but she added, 'And now about to-morrow—'

'I have not a horse,' said Tom; 'here at least.'

'Papa can give you a mount: you can have your choice of the black Irish mare, Neck or Nothing, or the Scots Grey.'

'A deuced good nag—sire Avenger,' commented Reynolds, looking up from the side of Milly, with whom he was dawdling over an album; 'he will carry sixteen stone with the fastest hounds in Sussex.'

'I have a fancy to try that horse myself to-morrow,' said Foxley; 'and so, if Mr. Seymour preferred the mare—'

'She is sometimes very unmanageable and

tricky, though papa gave 450*l.* for her ; and unless Mr. Seymour has been riding of late—’ Mabel paused.

‘ Why did you suggest her, then ?’ asked her cousin.

‘ It was indeed thoughtless of me,’ said Mabel.

There was a strange smile in Foxley’s eyes when they met those of Seymour, who said,

‘ I shall ride the mare with pleasure, Miss Brooke. I have a firm hand and a good seat, and never fear, if there is any mischief in her when we set out, she will come home quiet enough.’

‘ Without her rider, I hope !’ thought Foxley ; but he only said, with a smile full of insolent meaning,

‘ Any way, we shall not ride by Pyecombe to-morrow,’ and moved away.

Mabel once glanced nervously at Seymour, for it was at Pyecombe that most terrible mischance occurred—terrible at least in the hunting field—when he rode his horse right

among the Brighton harriers, while the whole pack were going so close that a table-cloth might have covered them.

‘Milly has suggested we shall go round by Brighton, Hangleton, and so on to the South Downs,’ said Mabel, speaking very quickly, in hope that her cousin’s rude speech had been unheard by Seymour.

‘By Brighton be it, then,’ said Reynolds, twirling his tawny moustache. ‘I am sure we could not have a better guide to pleasant scenery than Miss Allingham. What do you think, Stanley?’

‘I have no opinion on the matter,’ replied Rowland, with a ‘company smile.’ ‘The country hereabout is quite new to me.’

‘I will show you, Mr. Seymour,’ resumed Mabel, ‘where, when Milly and I were out with the harriers, a good hare, which was found in a field, went straight over by Poynings and Edburton, then right away down by the river, where he took shelter in some large rabbit-burrows, among which Milly’s horse would have come down had not Captain

Reynolds and his friend Larkspur of the Hussars been close at hand to grasp her bridle. I was so glad the hare escaped us, as I always shudder to see the poor things killed, and their cries are so piteous.'

'Reynolds again—and Reynolds always!' thought Stanley.

'It was to reward him for that,' said little Fanny Conyers, all unaware that she would stick a pin into her companion, 'she made Captain Reynolds such a beautiful set of colours, in which he is to ride a steeplechase next week.'

'The deuce she has!' muttered Stanley under his breath. All such trifles and indications galled him, as adding to the sum-total of his doubt and jealousy. 'I *am* a fool to have come here!'

Music chiefly filled up the evening till the time came for retiring—the ladies to rest, the four younger men to have a farewell 'weed' in the smoking-room for an hour or so, that was passed less soothingly by the old lord of the manor.

Less ambitious, we have said, than his wife, old Mr. Brooke would have been very content to see his gentle Mabel the wife of his nephew and favourite Alf Foxley, who seemed so fond of her; but the idea of him being a suitor for his cousin came as little into the scope of Mrs. Brooke's plans or thoughts, as did Tom Seymour into those of her inferior half. At the latter she had *looked* much—volumes indeed—all that evening, but said nothing till she could borrow a leaf from Mrs. Caudle; and they were barely abed when she opened fire upon him.

‘So, after all, you have brought *that* Mr. Seymour among us again, Mr. Brooke!’ she exclaimed, in a tone indicative more of anger than sorrow.

‘Why not, Martha, my dear? His father was the best friend I ever had in the City, long ago.’

‘Best fiddlestick! What is the use of a young man with only two or three hundred a year, and no expectations?’

‘Use—in what way, Martha?’

‘Pshaw !’

‘I have no doubt he would rather have six or seven hundred a year if he could.’

‘He is so poor.’

‘Well, Martha, *I* wasn’t rich once.’

‘So you were vulgar enough to remember, John, with your wretched souvenirs of Gravesend and Cremorne. I wonder what Captain Reynolds thought.’

‘I don’t care a doit what he thought,’ replied the old gentleman testily.

‘After *all* I have told you—do you hear me, *Mr. Brooke*? ’

‘Yes, Martha dear, well.’

‘After all I have urged again and again, I say you have brought here that young man, who seems to admire Mabel, and who is not in our set.’

‘Nonsense ! What’s our “set,” I should like to know ? And as for Mabel, I wouldn’t give house-room to any man who didn’t admire her. Then as for Tom, he is a good, and his father was a jolly good, fellow ; and many a bit of blue paper poor old Tom did for me,

'Martha, in the days when I never thought we should drift so far westward as Park Lane and Tyburnia. What can you lay to young Seymour's charge, save that he is poor?'

'Is not that enough, Mr. Brooke?'

'Well, as I said, I was poor enough myself once,' urged the old gentleman almost piteously. 'Poor old Tom Seymour—Tom Noddy we used to call him, though he wasn't a noddy a bit, but an uncommonly smart fellow. Lord, how ill we used to make ourselves with the cheap cigars and "old-and-bitter" out of pewter at the Hen and Chickens! He insured his life for his wife and young Tom, but left the management of it to a lawyer fellow, who cheated them both. Now, Martha dear, please to let me sleep.'

'Sleep!' snapped the lady.

'Yes; and don't bother, old ducky.'

'You do nothing but sleep, or if awake you thwart and cross me.'

Mr. Brooke turned on the other tack, and resolved on resolute silence.

‘Now listen to me for the last time: do you hear me, Mr. Brooke?’

But ere she could say what she intended, a prolonged snore—real or pretended—gave a hint that the lecture had ended for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RIDING PARTY.

AT Thaneshurst everything, even to the disposal of his own time, was at the behest of the visitor: he could gallop on the downs, drive to Brighton, fish in the Ouse, if aught was to be fished there; boat if he chose, shoot, go out with the harriers, or stay at home, if it listed him, to philander on the terrace or in the conservatory. Hence all looked forward with pleasure to the riding party; and during breakfast the route to be chosen was left entirely to Mabel and Milly Allingham.

The morning was lovely: it was one of the last days of August; the extreme verdure of the groves and hedgerows was past; but the golden fruit was ripening in the orchards, and there were already tints in the woods which some prefer to the loveliest blossoms of April and May; and from the windows of

Thaneshurst the distant sea could be seen glittering in light, and in the middle distance the green-velvet verdure of the downs, in the combs and hollows between which the silvery morning mist yet lingered.

All were in high spirits: the equestrians were to start soon, that they might return in time to luncheon, as the evening was to be devoted to a great croquet party at the house of a friend; so, while the ladies sipped their coffee out of the most delicate Wedgwood, Reynolds, Stanley, and others, who were more used to club-life, made a meal that might have served for Lucullus—to their coffee adding cutlets, devilled kidneys, and champagne, with other delicacies *ad libitum*.

On this morning Seymour was rather surprised to find that Alfred Foxley was more than usually attentive to him: pressed some of his most choice cigars upon him, and insisted upon his imbibing more champagne than, at an hour so unwonted, Tom had ever drunk in his life before; and all the while 'cousin Alf' had a glitter in his gray-green

eyes, and a strange smile on his thin lips, which his red moustache concealed.

‘While with us, Seymour,’ said he, ‘you must ride daily and ride hard. You are getting too fleshy; we’ll have to get you a seven-pound saddle. The fact is, you government officials feed too well, and so get out of form.’

Tom laughed, and murmured some protest that he did not think so. While aware that he did not keep a nag, and was not a very experienced horseman, Foxley did his utmost to scare him—as it was proposed when returning to have a free gallop over hedges and walls—by a narrative of rotten ditches, made so to betray the unwary, of drains dug deep enough to break a horse’s back, of gates that swung open and caught one’s nag in attempting to clear them, of stone walls that were certain to smash a rider’s skull if his horse fell back upon him.

‘We shall meet with no such things in our homeward ride, I am sure,’ said Seymour laughingly. ‘Any way, we shall take every-

thing as it comes, or go crash through it, as the case may prove.'

Reynolds, the Guardsman, saw something of Foxley's secret game, and smiled to himself. In fact, 'cousin Alf' had a natural insolence of character, and that, with a perfect conviction that his means, though far inferior to his wants and extravagance, were greatly superior to those of Seymour, and that his position in the family and household as kinsman of the heiress of Thaneshurst was a confirmed one, gave him every advantage in the furtherance of his ultimate views. He had thus, take it all in all, a species of contempt blended with his intense hate of Seymour, which made him deem that young fellow beneath him—'a muff,' in fact, which Tom was not by any means.

'Please, Alf, to leave my Berlin wools alone,' said Mabel to that personage, who seemed busy at her work-table in the recess of a window. 'Now, you tiresome Alf, what *are* you doing, twiddling all my bodkins so!'

He only laughed and turned away to leave

the room, with a shade of confusion on his face noticed by Stanley alone ; but it was very curious that a few minutes afterwards, when requiring it, Mabel found one of her sharp steel bodkins missing, and nowhere could it be found.

Could she have looked into Foxley's room at that moment she might have seen him curiously fixing that identical bodkin into the shank of his riding-whip, making it a species of goad, and muttering while he did so,

‘ So she is to show him where the hare was found in the field. I'll give the Irish mare a prod with this as she takes the rasper, that will make a rasper for Seymour to remember to the end of his days. But it is Lombard Street to a China orange that he'll break his infernal neck.’

And the further to achieve this, to him, desirable end he had desired Pupkins, the groom, to give the mare—at all times restive enough—an extra feed of corn betimes ; and though Pupkins deemed it unnecessary he nevertheless complied. The friendly Alf Fox-

ley wished her to come forth so fresh and skittish that he would have given her a hot mash with whisky in it had he dared.

‘ Won’t it be nuts to see him on the Irish mare, a regular flyer, from head to heel, especially with the *spur* I shall put into her! I’ll have another weed on the head of it.’

Unaware of all these little attentions and preliminaries, Seymour was thinking only with delight of the open hint he had received to ride by Mabel’s side, and that she was to show him where the hare was found, and so forth ; and when the whole party were ready, Stanley came forth determined, so far as *he* was concerned, to leave all to the doctrine of chances. If fate put him by the side of Milly, all good and well ; if not, he strove to think he would not care ; but we fear he strove in vain.

Of all the four—for there were two Miss Conyers—Milly Allingham looked the most excelling in her dark-blue habit, which fitted her fine and round yet slender figure to perfection ; and to perfection also were the masses of her dark-brown hair, tightly and curiously

coiled up at the back of her head, thus throwing a little over her forehead the smartest of riding-hats ; and, to her well-fitting gauntlets and gold-mounted switch, her toilet was complete.

The cattle were all in fine condition ; and leaving the ladies to be assisted into their saddles by any one who chose, Foxley, full of his own thoughts, was already curveting about on Scots Grey. Pupkins, the principal groom, a long-bodied and short-legged man, with a small mean face, with weasel eyes and closely shaven chin, well-worn velveteen jacket and very loose cord breeches, now led forward, with something of an air of pride, the Irish mare Neck or Nothing.

She was indeed a splendid creature, of a jet-black colour, with a skin like satin, and a white star on her forehead, in full condition, bursting with mischief, and matchless in symmetry ; but at times she had an ugly way of throwing her eyes backward and showing a little too much of the white thereof.

Val Reynolds, who, with all his 'Dun-

drearyism,' was a good-natured fellow, thought that Seymour could scarcely handle such a nag, and, as he afterwards said, was on the point of offering to ride her himself, but feared to give offence by interfering, and thus left the over-night arrangement to be carried out by those most interested in the affair, and swung the Conyers girls deftly into the saddle, adjusted their stirrups, and arranged their reins.

‘Is she not a beautiful creature, Mr. Seymour?’ exclaimed Fanny Conyers, her little face flushed with excitement and pleasure.

Tom scarcely shared her enthusiasm ; and though far from being a timid horseman, he feared that he had been ‘trapped,’ and felt instinctively that to-day he would require all his skill and energy ; yet he examined the bit in the most approved fashion, and taking the stirrup-iron in hand, brought it sharply under his right arm to try the length of the leather ; while, as Mabel patted the mare’s side with her gloved hand, the animal swerved viciously round in the groom’s hand.

‘Take care, miss,’ exclaimed old Pupkins ; ‘for the Lord’s sake, keep clear of her hind feet ; she is apt to lash out a little now and then.’

‘It is only play,’ said Foxley.

‘But main dangerous, Muster Alf,’ retorted the groom. ‘She is a rare good un, Miss Mabel ; you’ve seen how she can top a wall, though she does buck-jump, as all them Hirish ones does. You’ll find her a capital fencer, sir,’ he added to Seymour ; ‘only see that she lifts her head well while about it.’

‘What does it all mean?’ thought Tom ; for somehow old Pupkins seemed to talk as if they were all going to a steeplechase instead of a quiet ride round Brighton.

Stanley lifted Milly to her saddle, and Reynolds did the same office for Mabel, Seymour not venturing to do so while the eye of Mrs. Brooke was on him from the arch of the *porte-cochère*, where she and her spouse stood smilingly to see the party off, so full of pleasure and laughter, attended by a couple of well-mounted grooms in orthodox riding-

suits. Mr. Brooke, though caring nothing about it, knew how to do all this sort of thing well. ‘Papa, dear old man,’ as Mabel said, ‘subscribes to the hounds of course, but would no more think of following them than going in a balloon.’

‘Take care, Tom; do take care, my dear boy!’ cried Mr. Brooke, as Seymour’s mare manifested a violent desire to go persistently sideways, or, as Pupkins phrased it, ‘run up a tree if she could.’

As they rode down the avenue, Mr. Brooke lingered, with his left hand under his coat-tail, like Mr. Pickwick, the other waving in the air, and, like Mr. P., his eyes ‘were beaming with benevolence’ through his gold-rimmed spectacles; and Mrs. Brooke was thinking of her last confidence to Captain Reynolds to take care of her Mabel, who was ‘such a timid thing on horseback’—a little fib made up for the nonce; for Mabel, with all her softness, was nothing of the kind; but, to her annoyance, she saw the captain riding by the side of Miss Allingham. While the party wheeled

into the sunny Lewes road, Seymour's mare, now reduced to calmness, ambled by the side of Mabel's bay pad with provoking proximity, as Mrs. Brooke said.

Tom sat the black mare well, and Mabel thought—and she was right—that he had about him the indescribable look and bearing of a gentleman; and the girl was very happy, for now, in the innocence of her heart, she could calculate on the pleasure of his society for a little time without alloy or the worrying circumspection enforced by the presence of mamma.

How little could she imagine that Foxley, who rode between them, chatting merrily to both, was in full hope to see Tom flying through the mare's ears before very long!

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRINCE OF WALES'S OWN HUSSARS.

ROWLAND STANLEY was compelled to admit to himself that there was a certain undefinable awkwardness in his present relations with Milly Allingham. Neither could forget their last meeting or parting, and what had passed between them then. A Rubicon had been crossed by his avowal, which made them more to each other than mere acquaintances or even friends; but nothing had come of it; and even with all the facilities afforded by a visit to Thaneshurst it was doubtful how, when, or where, if ever again, the subject nearest the hearts of both—of him most assuredly—would be resumed.

The difficulty of chatting gaily with her, as he could do with her lady-friends, made him adopt another extreme, and become reserved, almost shy, in fact; and thus he, with

emotions of jealous annoyance hard to describe, left her almost entirely to Reynolds or any one else.

Milly saw and knew all this; and the conviction of the cause from which his apparent coldness sprung was very soothing to that young lady's pride. While conversing and laughing merrily, they rode on amid the scenery that spoke so genuinely of Sussex: now between fields of rich pasture in varied stripes of green—the farmer's posy—with light and shadow playing on the swelling downs, and the white chalky scours in the middle distance, with dark-browed hills beyond. The downs looked green and high, almost like miniature mountains, with white sheep—the famous 'south-downs'—feeding far up their sides, and standing in gray relief against the clear blue sky.

After passing Ovingdean, a place about three miles from Brighton, and having a scamper round the racecourse, as they drew near the cavalry barracks, a regular pile of buildings on the Lewes road, three officers of

Hussars, in frogged patrol jackets and the daintiest of forage-caps, came cantering gaily up to the party, in a manner which, to Stanley's cloudy mind, remembering all that Milly had suggested yesterday of proceeding by Brighton and Hangleton, had an unpleasant air of some foreknowledge or pre-arrangement.

‘Is this chance or mere coquetry?’ thought he, as he detected a deepening colour in her cheek and a brighter sparkle in her eye, as they reined-in their horses, and paid the usual greetings, with all the finished air of well-bred men.

‘The Master of Badenoch, Major Larkspur, and Mr. Craven—Captain Stanley,’ said Reynolds, introducing them.

‘Ah!—remember you—met at the Rag, I think,’ said the first named, a handsome and good-humoured-looking young fellow, who seemed on excellent terms with himself and all the world, and, like his two companions, seemed a fair specimen of the English cavalry officer, who, in tone and bearing, is superior to every other in the world.

‘Out for a canter, eh?’ asked the major.

‘Yes,’ said Mabel; ‘we propose to go as far as Bramber.’

‘May we join you, Miss Brooke?’ asked the major.

‘With pleasure.’ So the three Hussars wheeled round their horses at once, and the party proceeded at an easy walk. The Hussars had nearly all been at Thaneshurst to breakfast and a lawn-meet, so the house was popular with the regiment, which had given a ball in return; and that event had been followed by more walks on the West Pier, croquet-parties, visits to the Aquarium, and lounges in the Pavilion, than our two friends had the least idea of; but Stanley was not a little surprised to find his usually proud and reserved idol was as much at home with the new accessions to the party as with Reynolds, and far more than with himself, who had already said that he loved her. Was her pride becoming vanity, her calm yet free manner *aplomb*? This was impossible, unless her character had changed.

He said something of this, as he dropped a little way behind with his friend.

‘Have you forgotten, Rowland,’ said the latter, ‘that

“Maidens, like moths, are ever caught by glare,
And Mammon wins his way when seraphs might despair”?

‘I don’t think there is much of the seraph about me, Tom,’ muttered Stanley; ‘but I can’t help feeling rather bitter on this subject.’

‘Hallo!’ said Tom, ‘where the deuce are they going?’

‘Into the barracks, it would seem.’

‘The barracks!’ said Tom; ‘for what purpose?’

‘To have some fruit and wine in the mess-room,’ said Reynolds, half turning in his saddle, while Major Larkspur, who was now riding by Milly’s side, led the way through the gate across the gravelled yard to the mess-room, where sundry Hussars who were loitering about were summoned to take charge of the horses, while the whole party alighted

and were ushered into the mess-room, a long and cool, but plain and unornamented apartment, with remarkably shiny tables and furniture.

To be in such a place as a mess-room, a land hitherto to them unknown, was to the young ladies a source of great glee and excitement,—even Mabel forgot that her mother might remark they should not have been there without some *other* chaperon than her cousin,—so everything was the object of inspection and many original remarks. Some Crimean trophies on the wall, the race-cups won by the regiment glittering on the side-board, and portraits of some colonels of the regiment, including Humphry Gore, in wig and breast-plate, who served in the time of the Hanoverian succession, and H.R.H. George Augustus Frederick, Prince of Wales, in after years; Thackeray's man of well-oiled wigs and ample waistcoats; the hero of the Pavilion close by—the 'Fum the Fourth' of Byron.

The messman brought silver beakers full of iced champagne-cup, which was poured into

crystal goblets; fruit on salvers was produced in plenty; but Larkspur recommended all to take, in preference, dry claret and sliced pineapple, saying, in sporting phrase, that 'they ran well together;' and, accustomed though he was to barrack life, there was something in the bearing and manner of the Hussar friends, a singular mixture of languor and *insouciance*, that made Stanley smile; for, as Con Cregan has it, it seemed as if 'youth were the most embarrassing and wearying infliction mortality was heir to.'

Mabel had the reputation of being heiress to great wealth, yet Milly Allingham received more attention than any of the party; and the Master of Badenoch, eldest son of a Scotch peer, as his title imports, 'a well-known connoisseur in female beauty and horseflesh,' as Foxley whispered, seemed devoted to her; and the fact of so many admiring Milly served somehow to pique the pride of Stanley and to enhance her value in his eyes.

But he felt his anger roused when again the party mounted, and, quitting the barrack,

took the way towards Preston, Milly and Badenoch leading, when, dropping a little to the rear, he found himself accosted, in that free-and-easy manner which the freemasonry of the service inspires, by Major Larkspur, who began with considerable fluency—and, as Stanley thought, flippancy—to talk of their lady-friends.

The major was about thirty; he had seen more of life than most men of his years; his brown hair already showed a white streak or two; his eyes had a clear and bold, yet dissipated, expression when he looked at women; and his nose, though perfectly straight and handsome, had, we grieve to say, a tint somewhat akin to the scarlet facings of the Hussars.

‘Your first visit to this quarter, I suppose, Stanley?’ said he, adjusting in his eye a glass, without which it seemed impossible for him to speak.

‘To Thaneshurst, yes.’

‘I meant that. As for Piccadilly-super-Mare, every one comes there at some time. Known the Brookes long?’

‘No, only for half a London season or so; and I am here for the first of the month chiefly.’

‘Ah, I shall be with you then; old Mr. Brooke has put a couple of guns at the disposal of Badenoch and myself. Yours are stationed at— Oh, yes, I remember.’ And rapidly dismissing the subject, as if it did not matter where such obscure fellows as mere infantry were quartered: ‘Fine-looking girl, Miss Allingham—might stuff a saddle with her back hair, by Jove!’

Stanley rather coldly agreed that she was so; but Craven, the third cavalry man, who by the narrowness of the way had been compelled to fall rearward and join them, was warm in his laudation of Milly’s beauty, her grace in dancing and riding, and so forth, especially the faultless fitting of her riding-habit.

‘They say at the mess,’ he lisped, while stroking the place where he was glad to see a moustache was coming, ‘that she has a pretty pot of money, but she always affects that Guards fellow, Reynolds.’

‘Did so, you mean, till Badenoch joined to be in time for the regimental ball,’ said the major; ‘and since then I think Reynolds has been nowhere. He is a great sportsman; has shot and fished all over Norway, from the Cattegat to the land of the midnight sun; and is a fellow who is up to everything in sporting life, from bringing down a couple of red deer on his native hills, right and left—the shots well put with his breechloader—to a rat hunt; and from knocking over his brace of rocketers on a breezy day to a game of pool in the evening. Moreover, as a regular drawing-room pet, no one can have a chance with him, so far as Miss Allingham is concerned. Then he cares nothing about coin, you know.’

‘But it is no use running after la belle Millicent,’ lisped Sub-lieutenant Craven, ‘or I might start for the filly stakes myself.’

‘Why?’

‘She seems chiefly bent on having a string of admirers.’

‘Well, but what pretty girl is not? She is a flirt, a coquette if you please; but w

make them so—they think it such pleasant fun, playing at being in love.'

'But she is deuced stand-off, I can tell you,' persisted the sub-lieutenant.

'I don't think Val Reynolds or Badenoch of ours finds her so. By Jove,' sighed the major, 'but for them I shouldn't care to try and make my innings and bring her to book; for I may have to sell out, Craven, if the oaks on the old place won't clear me.'

Craven only laughed, and whistled softly 'Woodman, spare that tree.' 'Why not hook the wealthy widow who lives westward of the Steyne, major?'

'Thanks, no; "life," as some one says, "is not a bed of roses, especially when you have a woman to deal with who has seen more of life in five years than you have in twenty." The matrimonial couch would be too thickly studded with thorns. But with Milly Allingham now—'

But now Stanley, who had listened to this with something of fierce impatience, seeing a place vacant beside Miss Conyers, spurred his

horse to the front and joined her. But she found him somewhat of a moody companion as she prattled away, and acting like a sweet little cicerone, as she was, did all the honours of the scenery as they rode by Preston, where she showed him the large house once occupied by Anne of Cleves, and the old church with its slender tower, by Blackington and Hangleton, till they turned at Bramber-on-the-Adur, near the old Norman castle, and rabbit-burrows, where the hare had been lost. But pretty Mabel, having then Tom Seymour entirely to herself, had forgotten all about that episode, which seemed so important yesterday; and now, as they turned their horses' heads homeward, Alfred Foxley began to think that if he was to turn to account the event of Seymour riding the vicious mare, he had better utilise the first available occasion for mischief.

What he meant to do beyond giving him an affronting and dangerous 'spill' it is, perhaps, impossible to speculate. During all this morning ride, the open preference his beauti-

ful cousin had so plainly shown for Seymour filled the heart of Foxley with jealous rage, and a rancour that made him peculiarly oblivious of the eventualities of his scheme.

Who, then, that saw this fashionable, well-appointed, and well-mounted party of friends riding along the sunny English highway, full of animation and high spirits, and attended by grooms in broad belts, could have imagined that among them there was one who treasured in his heart the almost felon intentions of Foxley?

CHAPTER X.

HOW TOM 'CAME TO GRIEF.'

ALREADY they were returning homeward to Thaneshurst ; noon was nearly over, and Stanley, beyond some remark on the beauty of the day, had barely spoken a word to Milly Allingham ; and she, piqued perhaps by this, or careless about the matter, made no sign that she wished him by her side, but seemed bent on dazzling Reynolds and Badenoch (as they called him, though his proper name was Comyn), who rode by her rein ; and Rowland could little suppose that half the animated conversation they carried on across her dwelt on sporting matters.

‘ How long are she and I to be thus ? ’ thought he. ‘ Is each of us overacting a part to the other ? Shall we ever be on any other terms ? ’

Amid a network of those cool, shady, and

green grassy lanes so peculiar to England, the party, riding by twos and threes, got rather broken up, and Stanley, after missing Miss Allingham and Reynolds for a few minutes, saw them rejoining the road at a right angle by a path between two fields. They were coming on at a pace so rapid that they nearly rode down a poor old canvas-frocked truffle-hunter, who, accompanied by his dog and armed with his *spud*, was hunting under the hedgerows for that fungus which is in so much request about the end of August and beginning of September.

She was trying to rein-in her horse, laughing the while, and quite unlike her usually proud self, at her inability to do so. At last, with the assistance of Reynolds' strong and skilful hand, she succeeded, and pushed back her half-disordered hair, looking flushed, breathless, and beautiful, as once again she adjusted herself quietly in her saddle, with her left knee pressed against the horn, the right tightly round it, as her horse was disposed to be restive still, and Reynolds' hand

was still placed on her gathered reins, as if to reassure her.

‘Thanks, very much,’ said she, withdrawing, and adding, with a shy glance at Stanley, ‘we were so near losing you all at that awkward turn of the road where the hare was found.’

If aught could steel or rouse the heart of Stanley against one he loved so well, it was some of the features of that day’s riding party. He felt too surely that Milly was very much reserved with him—much more so than she was with others—Reynolds especially; and it was but too evident how friendly and intimate they had become during the past weeks at Thaneshurst; and forgetting that people are pretty sure to be so in the limited circle of a country house, he could only mutter, ‘Muff that I was to come here!’ and then remember what he had once felt, the strange possibility of loving and hating at the same time.

But an episode was at hand which diverted the thoughts of all speedily from themselves.

Badenoch was now making himself agree-

able to Mabel, so Seymour found himself between Major Larkspur and Foxley.

'I know a near cut right home, across the fields, through the lawn of the vicarage, our home farm, and into Thaneshurst clean,' said the latter, on seeing that all the rest of the party were well ahead along the road. 'The way is all open—stubble or clover fields, with only a few fences; suppose we have a shy at them. What do you say, Seymour?'

The latter hesitated; so Foxley said,

'What say you, major?'

'I am ready; but how about the ladies?'

'The ladies can follow if so disposed; they are all well mounted, and know the country well. Home! Let us see who will be first at the door of Thaneshurst!' cried Alf, brandishing his whip.

'It is rather a mad proceeding,' said the major, in whom the genuine English racing spirit was easily kindled; but Seymour was less easily excited.

'Come along, Seymour,' exclaimed Foxley;

‘it is all open, I tell you, except a fence or two, and we’ll take all the leaps together.’

‘And your cousin?’ urged Tom.

‘Never mind her; she’ll be well enough looked after,’ said Foxley, almost savagely; ‘you are surely not *afraid*?’

‘Afraid!’ retorted Tom indignantly. ‘How dare you think so!’

But as the trio turned off into a grass field at a rapid trot, Alf uttered something like a malediction as his cousin Mabel joined them at a canter. Her quick eye or her affectionate heart had detected some secret mischief lurking in her cousin’s eye; so she said in a low rapid voice to Tom.

‘Mr. Seymour, you don’t know Neck or Nothing so well as we all do. Don’t let Alf lead you over the fences, but do you *lead him*, lest he balk you. Don’t rush at the fences too fast; keep her well in hand, with her hind legs well together, and don’t plump her whatever you do.’

Some of this was rather obscure to Seymour, but his heart beat lightly at the hurried

whisper which betokened an interest in his safety.

'Now, cousin Mabel,' said Foxley, 'you were very foolish to join us.'

'Why?' asked the laughing girl, whose spirits became exhilarated by the pace at which they were going.

'Because, when we reach the grass land yonder, the pace will become a cracker,' replied Foxley, who was fond of adopting the slang of the harness-room and hunting-field.

Mabel had no breath then wherewith to reply; their friends were all lost now, and she thought of what mamma might say, and that the whole episode was a little wild and unusual in a quiet riding party; and now, as a high beech-hedge appeared before them, they lessened the pace of their horses to breathe them a little, and then all charged it together.

Aware that his practice was but small, and that he was splendidly mounted, Seymour gave all his attention to this first leap. He seated himself well in the saddle as he ap-

proached the fence; there was no use for spurs, and as Neck or Nothing sprang into air, he loosened the bridle, using his right hand as well as the left, giving the mare full and free use of her head, leaning his body freely back the moment the spring was made, yet without losing the power of restraining her when the leap was completed, and the beautiful animal had cleared the high beech-hedge without grazing a twig with her shiny hoofs, and also a nasty sunk fence that lay beyond.

‘Splendidly done!’ exclaimed Mabel, with flushed cheek and flashing eye, as her horse alighted beside his at the same moment. Alf’s nag, Scots Grey, was a second or so behind; Major Larkspur a second longer, but he took the ditch at a broader place, and had only time to exclaim,

‘Hang it, Foxley, where are you taking us? what are you up to? This is like a steeplechase!’

He had lit on a rotten bank, come a tremendous ‘cropper,’ and lay like a spread-eagle, with his face and patrol jacket all over mud.

Seymour and Mabel were disposed to wait till the major gathered himself up, but not so Foxley.

'Come on, Seymour,' cried he; 'don't be a skycock; Larkspur's all right. Don't go at a market pace—butter and eggs. We've a rasper or two before us now!'

So Seymour galloped on; and in her anxiety, Mabel accompanied him, but some distance behind now—a hundred yards or so—leaving Larkspur of the Prince of Wales's Hussars to his own devices.

'Now for the trap, while *she* is behind!' muttered Alf Foxley, gently holding-in his gray, till Seymour was going with him neck and neck, and not so able to lead as before, and now another hedge higher even than the last rose before them.

'No craning here, Seymour,' cried Foxley, 'nor must you press the mare so hard as before. There is no sunk fence here. But take care, she looks as if she meant mischief.'

There was no sunk fence certainly, as the speaker knew very well, but there was a deep

old roadway at the bottom of a bank that shelved abruptly down in the line Seymour was pursuing. The leap was most perilous if not completely cleared, as Foxley knew by old experience *he* himself would do, so he closed in nearer by his side, in his hate of his companion half forgetful that his cousin might follow; but she, aware of the danger, while crying to them imploringly to pause, was seeking at another point a gap in the hedge.

‘Charge the rasper!’ shouted Foxley, and, as before, to the leap rose both animals gallantly; but now Foxley, still intent on his wicked scheme, in the excitement of the moment, or with one of those sudden gleams of thought which come so quickly for evil as well as good, instead of dashing the goad with which he had armed his whip into the flank of the fiery mare, gave her—unseen somehow by her rider—a dreadful lash right across the eyes—a cut that blinded her for the moment, and made her utter a snort of rage and pain.

Balked thus in her leap, she sank headlong

down in a heap on the hard road ; and when Foxley, safe on the other bank, looked back, he saw the mare staggering up, shaking her ears and snorting, quivering in every limb, while blood and dust disfigured her knees ; and on the dusty road her rider, still grasping his reins, was lying senseless, with blood oozing from his mouth, and so motionless that a sudden thrill of terror came over the heart of Foxley.

Passing the hedge at the gap to which she had ridden, Mabel rode hastily down the lane, and, uttering a piteous cry on beholding this catastrophe, leaped from her horse, and with the reins thrown loosely over her left arm knelt by the side of Seymour.

‘ Alf—Alf ! Cousin Alfred—dear Alf !’ she cried, but in vain.

That worthy, affecting that he had lost all control of his horse, which by dint of spur and bit he was causing to bound and curvet wildly, suddenly rushed the animal at a five-foot wall, and lifted him over, hurling the loosened stones behind in a heap as he van-

ished beyond it, leaving the poor girl to her terror, her tears, and misery, with Seymour, whom by the pallor of his face she supposed to be killed.

As for Foxley, he was simply sufficiently of a coward to wish to give his rival a dreadful fall or smash; he was not brave enough to murder him—that did not come within the scope of his amiable intentions; and so now, with a heart full of excitement and terror, which he strove to cover by a bearing of mockery and contempt, he rode back towards the party he had left, and speedily overtook Reynolds and Craven with the Misses Conyers; the rest were a few paces off, and all were making merry at the appearance of Major Larkspur, who had preceded him.

‘Hallo! what is up, Fox?’ said Reynolds; ‘you look put out.’

‘We have had another spill,’ gasped Foxley, while exclamations of alarm burst from the ladies.

‘Heavens! not the young lady—not Miss Brooke.’

'No; the duffer that rode into the harriers at Pyecombe has come to grief again, and he's broken the knees of the Irish mare. Got spilt at the second fence—craning, or dragging on his bridle, too probably.'

'He should have been mounted on a screw; that Irish mare—'

'We have no screws in the stables, Mr. Craven,' said Foxley pettishly, to cover his emotion of fright; 'he rode, and always rides, like what he is, a duffing city clerk wanting to take his money's worth out of an unfortunate nag hired for the day; and now,' he added through his teeth, 'Mabel will be piling up the agony over his broken bones, curse him! A regular "Winkle," of course he thought himself A 1 in the pigskin,' he resumed aloud; 'my cousin is with him, but he must be carried home of course.'

'Is he a good style of fellow?' asked Larkspur, rubbing the mud off his jacket; while Reynolds, Stanley, and others of the party galloped up the narrow road.

'Yes, in his own estimation.'

‘Most of us are so,’ said the Hussar officer dryly; ‘but as he seemed a good-natured fellow, I do hope he is not severely hurt,’ was the kind addition of the major.

‘Can’t say; perhaps he has broken “some of his legs,” as Salem Scudder says in the play.’

The three Hussars eyed the speaker contemptuously.

‘We’ll come over to Thaneshurst and leave our cards to-morrow,’ said the major, as they shortened their reins to be off; for no matter who had ‘come to grief’—even one of the ladies—the Hussars were compelled to leave their friends now and return to barracks, as Larkspur’s watch informed them that the warning trumpet for evening parade would sound in twenty minutes, and it would take them every second of the time to scamper back by the Lewes road.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT MABEL'S ALARM ELICITED.

‘WILL Alf return? will no one ever come?’ moaned Mabel, to whom a few minutes seemed as long as hours of agony.

Never before had grief or terror visited Mabel Brooke; and to see the handsome and good-hearted young fellow whom she loved, and who she knew right well loved her, lying crushed, breathless, bleeding, and covered with dust, was her first great shock, and it stunned her. Their friends could not be far off. Alf knew what had happened, so what could be detaining him?

She strove to shriek, to cry for aid; but her voice failed her. Nor could she venture to leave and look for it, till she had done something in the way of attempting to revive him.

With trembling hands she undid his necktie and collar, raised his head on her arm, and while her tears fell upon his face, she kissed him tenderly on the forehead and eyes. She called him imploringly by his name as all the pent-up love of her heart went out to him in that time of terror and agony; and as she pressed one long, long kiss upon his cheek, he respiration heavily and opened his eyes.

Was he conscious of her caresses? Yes, but as one in a dream; he smiled, though there was somewhat of a bewildered stare in his eyes, and he sought to draw her face, now shrinking back, towards him; but his right arm hung powerless by his side.

‘Thank Heaven, you are recovering!’ she exclaimed fervently, for a moment forgetting what her alarm had elicited from her.

‘Yet, Mabel’ (he had never called her so before), ‘dear, dear Mabel, how sweet it would be to—to die now!’

‘Why?’ she asked, blushing in spite of herself.

‘With the knowledge that you love me,

that I have not loved you in vain, and that I had not lost you.'

'Hush, they are coming now,' said she, drying her tears in haste, as hoofs were heard approaching rapidly; and just as Seymour strove to stagger up, but did so in vain, being too stunned and weak, Reynolds, Stanley, Foxley, and the grooms came up, and simultaneously sprang from their horses; while Milly Allingham and the Conyers girls came cantering up too; and amid a chorus of questions, entreaties, and exclamations of wonder, pity, and alarm, Seymour was raised from the ground, but was unable to stand without support.

'I thought that mare was too much for him,' said Stanley, 'and I wish that I had ridden her.'

'Why?' asked Foxley.

'Because this accident would not have happened.'

'Wouldn't it?' asked the other bluntly.

'Of a surety it would not.'

'How?' he asked, remounting his gray.

‘Because I am a more experienced horseman than poor Tom.’

‘It was his own choice,’ said Foxley sulkily.

‘Pardon me, it was your planning, I think.’

‘It was *not* my planning, but Mabel’s suggestion,’ said Foxley, crimsoning with anger.

‘And your too ready adoption,’ retorted Stanley, whose secret dislike of Foxley was intense; ‘but it matters nothing now.’

Though scarcely thinking so, Stanley, who had seen many a broken bone when on service, assured Mabel that nothing was fractured; yet Tom’s right arm was powerless, his head contused, his whole system violently shaken, and there was reason to fear that he might have suffered serious internal injury; while the black mare, who was less the cause of all this mischief than the treacherous cut that Foxley had given her across the eyes, was leisurely cropping the grass by the way-side a few paces off, till one of the grooms captured her. From the headlong manner in

which she came down, Tom's hat, which was battered out of all shape, had alone saved him from, perhaps, concussion of the brain.

'O Mabel,' said Milly, 'how could you be so rash as by your presence to encourage this wild racing?'

'Encourage it!' exclaimed Mabel, tears starting again to her eyes.

'But of course you followed your cousin?'

'My cousin?' said Mabel, with something of scorn upon her quivering lip; for vaguely and angrily she had some undefinable suspicion in her mind. 'I rode while I could by Mr. Seymour's side, for I feared the mare was beyond his skill as a horseman.'

With all his stifled hate Foxley, as he surveyed the battered, dust-covered figure, and pale blood-streaked visage of his rival, was not without certain emotions of alarm. Thus there occurred to him the reflection of how he should have felt had Seymour been killed outright. Would he—Alf—have been suspected? had any eye unseen beheld him give the vicious mare the tremendous cut he

did? But though emotions either of compunction or pity found no place in his heart, he was rather glad that the general catastrophe was less serious than it promised to be. 'He will be sent back to town; and, anyhow, we shall be rid of him at Thaneshurst,' was his final idea. But Mr. Alfred Foxley was mistaken in this, and could little conceive how all his schemes were conducing to the very end he sought to mar.

A door was unhinged from the outhouse of a neighbouring cottage, and with the aid of the dismounted grooms, Stanley, and Foxley too, Seymour was placed thereon and borne shoulder-high through the chase towards Thaneshurst House.

'Keep step, keep step together, you fellows,' said Stanley from time to time, with a voice of authority and anxiety. 'I have seen too many sick and wounded borne in dhooleys and litters not to know that every jerk gives pain.'

Luncheon was spread in the stately dining-room at Thaneshurst; Pupkins and his staff

were in waiting to receive the cattle, and Mr. Mulbery, who had been on the look-out for the returning riding party, and whose chief anxieties were the state of the thermometer in his pantry, which suggested that the madeira might be worthless, or that the '15 port was not properly decanted, was now airing his portly figure under the cool and breezy *porte-cochère*. Mr. Brooke, sunk in his easy-chair, was deep in the money article of the *Times*, and was considering the fluctuation of Egyptian and Peruvian stocks, the flatness of Mexican, and so forth; while Mrs. Brooke, seating herself in a bay-window, alternately watched the avenue, and dawdled over a piece of charity work that, like the web of Penelope, never progressed. Mr. Brooke was just in the act of saying, 'Surely these young folks are very late, Martha. I hate being kept from my meals!' when an exclamation of alarm escaped his usually placid better-half on beholding the approaching procession; and really, with the five led horses and the litter borne shoulder-high, it had a sufficiently appalling aspect.

‘Oh, what can have happened!’ she exclaimed, starting up with clasped hands. A glance convinced her that Mabel was safe—the girls were all in their saddles. An accident had happened to some one. Ah, if it should be Captain Reynolds, a darling scheme might be crushed for ever; consequently she was greatly relieved in her mind when Pupkins, with an expression of face as if he thought it something of a joke, came hurrying into the entrance-hall to announce that the Irish mare had ‘given Mr. Seymour a precious spill in rushing at a rasper.’

It was *only* Mr. Seymour; yet the lady could not but look concerned, while the emotions of her husband were genuine and deep, as Seymour was borne at once to his room, and the two grooms were hastily despatched for medical aid.

Stanley and Mr. Mulbery got the sufferer undressed and into his bed, while Val Reynolds, caressing his tawny whiskers, and imbibing brandy-and-seltzer in the dining-room, with Foxley doing ditto with Röderer’s cham-



page well iced—he was horribly thirsty—retailed all he knew of the catastrophe.

‘Some fatality attends that boy whenever he comes here, Martha!’ exclaimed Mr. Brooke.

‘Then ask him no more,’ she replied; ‘to preclude the risk is very simple.’

Mabel’s heart swelled as she listened; but she turned affectionately to her father, who said,

‘Poor Tom, poor Tom! I have known him, Captain Reynolds, ever since he was a little boy about so high,’ he added, holding a fat pudgy hand about six inches from the Turkey carpet. ‘And so you are to blame for this, Alf?’

‘I, sir?’

‘Yes, you; by proposing this madcap race. With ladies in your company, how could you think of such a thing?’

‘Well, any way, we won’t have him with us on the 1st. If his shooting is no better than his riding, it might prove more dangerous for others than himself.’

‘But here is Clavicle, the doctor, at last,’ said Mr. Brooke, who bustled out to meet that personage as his brougham was announced at the door.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PATIENT.

AFTER due time the doctor, a pleasant little man with an ample beard, a merry roving eye, and a sunny, suave, and cultivated professional manner, joined Mr. Brooke in the library, where he anxiously awaited him.

‘Will the lad pull through, doctor?’ he asked impetuously.

‘Well—ah, my dear sir,’ began the doctor, playing with his beard.

‘Don’t hesitate to tell me the worst. I would rather lose a thousand—ten thousand pounds—than have had Tom’s son lying in this way here.’

‘Where could he be better cared for, my dear sir?’

‘Any bones broken?’

‘None.’

‘Thank God!’

‘But there is a severe case of dislocation, and then that knock on the head is an unpleasant feature. But there is every hope; he is young and healthy, yet must be kept very quiet—no excitement or anything of that sort, my dear sir. He has, though blood has been lost, feverish symptoms, so ice must be used freely. He is quiet now and likely to sleep, and he must remain here for the present.’

‘Of course, doctor, of course.’

‘It might be death to move him, my dear sir.’

‘Of course; we shall take every care. Oh, doctor, I love that lad as if he was my own son!’ exclaimed Mr. Brooke, while Alfred Foxley, who had just entered, ground his teeth as he heard him.

Then the doctor departed, announcing that he would call again on the morrow; but in a turn of the avenue his brougham was stopped by Mabel, who was still in her riding-habit, with the skirt thrown over her left arm, and

who thought he had been an age in Tom's room and with her papa.

'Dr. Clavicle,' said she, pausing and shivering, for all this excitement and suffering were so new to her after her butterfly existence, this deep care for and love of any one beyond her parents,—'doctor, please—'

'Well, Miss Brooke,' said he, smiling, and retaining in his the little hand she had placed on the open window of his brougham.

'Do you think he—he will die?' she asked with blanched and quivering lips.

'Die! Not at all.'

'Thank Heaven!'

The doctor smiled a professional smile; he had them for all kinds of occasions.

'You know this is a dreadful thing to happen to a guest here,' she added, as if to explain the cause of her too apparent interest.

'Perfectly, my dear Miss Brooke; all the more dreadful that the patient is young and handsome,' he added, with a knowing look; 'but don't alarm yourself.'

'His poor right arm—'

‘It is only a dislocation of the humerus or the upper bone, which, from its articulation as well as from its exposure to external injuries, is the most subject to dislocation of any in the human subject. His fall was a severe one, and I detected dislocation of the humerus instantly by the depression or cavity on the top of the shoulder, and the inability to move his arm. But I have now put the head of the bone in its proper place, and, my dear Miss Brooke, there is no cause for fear unless there is some internal injury.’

All this sounded dreadful and mysterious to Mabel, especially that Tom should be spoken of as ‘a human subject;’ so she said hesitatingly,

‘I would that I were allowed to nurse him.’

‘I fear that in that case he might be in no haste to get well,’ said the doctor gallantly. ‘But good-morning, my dear Miss Brooke—good-morning.’

And as his brougham rattled down the avenue, he thought no more of Tom than of



the last year's leaves, and betook him to *Punch* or the *Lancet*, while Mabel repeated to herself his last fatal surmise about the 'internal injury.' It came to her ear like a knell.

Mrs. Brooke was not an unkind or inhospitable person in the main; but it *did* worry her to find 'that Mr. Seymour' an invalid in her house, an object of solicitude apparently to all, established as it seemed *en permanence*; and to meet from time to time servants going up-stairs with trays of beef-tea and dry toast, arrowroot and sherry, Digweed's best grapes, and Mulbery with iced champagne; and more than all was she irritated by finding Mabel hovering, as if for the latest intelligence, near the room of one who, but for her 'John's arrant folly,' should never have been at Thaneshurst at all.

The first day of the accident passed slowly and heavily on. While poor Mabel, with her heart like to burst, sat in the drawing-room with a 'company smile' on her sweet face, endeavouring to look unconcerned, and fear-

ing that she had already revealed too much; while Mrs. Brooke fretted with the servants and fumed with every one, and her spouse pottered to and fro in great anxiety; and while Foxley knocked the balls about in the billiard-room with Val Reynolds or scanned *Bell's Life* in the harness-room, and seemed quite at his ease,—unfortunate Tom Seymour, little knowing the jealous treachery of which he was the victim, tossed wearily and feverishly on his bed, only conscious at times when he asked for a medicated drink, which Rowland Stanley, who, when on service, had seen much of sickness and suffering, was ever at hand to give him.

So the dull evening crept on, varied only by frequent messages to the patient's room; while inquiries, suggestions, and speculations concerning the accident, and anecdotes of similar cases, made up the staple of the conversation carried on at intervals in the drawing-room; and good Mr. Brooke, who worried his worthy and fashionable better-half by so often insisting on being helped twice to turtle-

soup at dinner, and assisted as often to iced rum-punch, partook of neither that day. He was 'too cut up,' he said, 'about old Tom Seymour's boy.'

'I do wish that I had been in the saddle of that mare,' said Stanley, 'instead of poor Tom.'

'But you might have been now in Mr. Seymour's place,' said Miss Allingham gently.

'Scarcely; yet all the better were it so.'

'Why?'

'Because,' said he in a low voice, 'save with the regiment, I have no one to regret any suffering or peril to which I may be subjected; but *he* has.'

Stanley was looking at Mabel, and thus he failed to see that which would have made his heart thrill—a pleading and upbraiding glance in the soft dark eyes of Milly, while those of Mabel looked at him almost with affection, she was so full of gratitude to him as the friend of Seymour; and it was on him she chiefly relied for exact reports of her lover's progress towards recovery.

She often found the eye of her mother regarding her watchfully, if not suspiciously; and when alone with her, she was always told by the old lady how irritating it was to think that because of this accident, the result, no doubt, of his own want of horsemanship, Seymour was more than ever linked somehow with Thaneshurst and the Brooke family. And once the poor girl's blood ran cold when she heard her mother say angrily,

‘I wish the mishap had taken place at Brighton rather than here.’

‘Why, mamma?’

‘Because then he might have been taken to some hotel, or the hospital perhaps.’

‘Martha dear, please don’t talk so,’ urged Mr. Brooke; ‘he’ll get well all the sooner in the hands of friends.’

And while her mother said these and many other hard things, Mabel had but one thought in her heart.

‘If he should die after all. Oh, if my Tom, my darling, should die, and he loves me so!’



Yet with all her regard for Seymour, with all the love she knew so well he had long borne her, she could not but feel her cheek grow hot when she thought over that scene in the lane, and of all she had said and done under the impulse of terror and affection. She had taken the initiative; the first declaration of love had come from her; yet she could not blame herself, and knew right well that Tom would not *blame* her either.

Two days elapsed before Alfred Foxley could bring himself to visit the bedside of his victim, and then only because his studied absence therefrom might excite remark. He accompanied Stanley, and did his best to appear perfectly at ease, for the eye of the captain regarded him steadily.

‘Well, Seymour, old fellow, how are you?’ he asked, shaking the left hand of the patient, whose right arm was still powerless and the source of exquisite pain. ‘I have brought you a box of fresh cigars, if the doctor and mamma Brooke have no objection to you smoking them here.’

‘Thanks; you are very kind.’

‘You did not give the mare her head enough that time; you’ll do better next, and not come such a cropper again,’ added the hypocrite, as he pressed the cold moist hand of the sufferer with apparent cordiality. ‘I warned you that Neck or Nothing meant some mischief.’

‘But too late,’ said Seymour; ‘poor Mabel—’

‘Mabel?’ repeated Foxley, biting his nether lip under his red moustache.

‘I mean Miss Brooke; what a fright she must have got!’

‘Not at all,’ replied the other bluntly; ‘she has seen more than one spill in the hunting-field; and the affair was like being out with the hounds, without being hampered with mamma at the Meet.’

Foxley’s tone seemed to hint so much as to say, ‘Don’t flatter yourself, my fine fellow, that you are too much an object of interest.’

‘I think you must have been a sheet or

two in the wind the other day,' said Foxley, with one of his unpleasant laughs.

' How can you think so?' asked Seymour.

' Remember the champagne-cup of those Hussar fellows; and perhaps it helps still to make you look so fishy and seedy. Flowers, eh?' he added, as his eye fell on a beautiful bouquet in a fine Chelsea vase by the bedside, the blue ground of which was painted with pastoral subjects.

' Miss Brooke is so kind as to send me fresh flowers every day.'

' Oh, ah, Mabel sent them—kind little thing, Mab! But you must have toppled off too much of that beastly stuff at the barracks.'

' Excuse me, Mr. Foxley,' said Stanley, with a stiffness of manner and something of sternness in his tone as he resented this coarseness of phraseology and the imputation, ' your words are unjust to my friend, and rather rude as referring to the Hussar mess. And now I think we will withdraw, as conversation is apt to make him feverish.'

The truth was that Seymour knew precisely the amount of liking Foxley had for him; and though he came now in the guise of a friend, his presence, his manner, and what he had said, brought a flush of unconcealed anger into the face of the listener; and, turning away, he waved his hand to Stanley, and said,

‘I would rather be left alone.’

And when alone, if he was not without some anxiety as to the future, he was full of happy thought. From the first moment when he became perfectly conscious and realised all that *had* passed, he felt only delight amid his bodily sufferings—delight as he recalled, like a delicious dream, the tearful and lovelit eyes that were gazing into his; the caresses, the kisses, the passionate utterances that brought him back to life. He was not so much stunned that he could not recollect all, and act the whole episode over again and again in memory.

And so would he fondly muse as the evening stole on, and the perfume of the flowers

her dear hands had gathered was wafted towards him, while twilight faded on the green swelling downs and on the distant tumbling sea, and the chimes were ringing so sweetly in the old square tower of the ivy-mantled village church. How delicious was the complete consciousness that she loved him, even though she never might be his! And he thought of a song she had sung to him,

‘Those evening bells, those evening bells,
How many a tale their music tells!’

and so forth.

How, when, or where would the last link of that love idyl in the lane be taken up again? Each evening, more than any other time of the twenty-four hours, was full of such thoughts,—‘evening, when,’ as Drake says in his *Evenings in Autumn*, ‘the busy scenes of our existence are withdrawn, when the sun descending leaves the world to silence and to the soothing influence of twilight, has ever been a favourite portion of the day with the wise and good; when there appears to be shed over the universal face of nature a

calmness and tranquillity, a peace and sanctity as it were, which almost insensibly steals into the breast of man, and disposes him to solitude and meditation. He naturally compares the decline of light and animation with that which attaches to humanity; and the evening of the day and the evening of life become closely assimilated in his mind.'

But Tom's reveries took, perhaps, more poetical turns than those referred to.

The wild whirl and turmoil of London life seemed far, far away from Thaneshurst. Through his open window stole the songs of birds, the rustle of leaves, the perfume of flowers, the chimes of bells in the village spire, the hum of bees, the voices of children playing in the shady green lanes—all the subdued sounds of life in the country.

If quietude and repose would restore him—if, when the time for it came to pass, the musing of dear Mabel Brooke could do so—Tom Seymour was soon in a fair way of being back at his desk in the City.

As time stole on and his absence became

protracted, his great fear was that he might forfeit his situation. What if he were maimed for life! He had served long enough, young though he was, to obtain even a pension from the niggard Whigs; but on such he might starve after all. And these were cloudy thoughts to foster side by side with those of love and Mabel. And then there was her mother.

‘I know the old lady despises me,’ said Tom one day to Stanley. ‘I fear she won’t even confess that I have a share in “the great firm which, under the name of Adam & Co., has toiled so long and industriously.”’

So the time stole on. The newspaper paragraphs concerning ‘the late serious accident at Thaneshurst,’ the cards left again and again by Messrs. Comyn, Larkspur, and Craven of the Hussars, and by friends and neighbours of the Brookes, were all unknown to Tom; while he progressed towards convalescence.

Prior to this, Stanley’s bugbear—for such he rather was—had left Thaneshurst to visit elsewhere.

CHAPTER XIII.

PIQUE.

‘GOOD-BYE, Captain Reynolds,’ said Milly as he bade her farewell at the conservatory door, when Mr. Mulbery announced the mailphaeton awaited him.

‘Adieu, Miss Allingham; and be assured that in the steeplechase I shall carry your colours to the fore.’

‘And do let it be your last race, Captain Reynolds,’ she urged.

‘Why?’ asked the captain, caressing his flyaway whiskers with a smile of surprise.

‘Because such things are *so* dangerous.’

He laughed, bowed himself out, and was gone, as he was engaged to shoot elsewhere on the 1st of September. The closest observation failed to enlighten Stanley, who saw them separate then, how the Guardsman stood with Milly Allingham, as he had been equally attentive to Mabel, to Fanny Conyers, and

her sister, both of whom were very attractive girls. But neither could Stanley ascertain how he personally stood with her; she was ever so provokingly serene and self-possessed. One fact became impressed upon him with unpleasant suspicion: that she never gave him, while Reynolds was at Thaneshurst, an opportunity—or perhaps chance failed to afford it—of being alone with her for a moment; so there could be no resumption of the subject of that *tête-à-tête* which had been so untowardly interrupted in town.

Stanley, however, felt almost assured that there could be nothing *in petto* between her and Val Reynolds, their parting seemed so simply like that of every-day friends in the world. I say almost assured; for, notwithstanding this apparent ease of manner, they might have their own great secret for all that he knew; Reynolds might already have made a declaration, have proposed and been accepted. His good looks were undeniable, and his expectations were—as Mrs. Brooke so often said to Mabel—so great.

Well, he was gone now; but was to return in time for a ball, to be given by the Hussars before their departure from Brighton; and thus, during his temporary absence, Stanley certainly had the field all to himself; but with all his love for Milly, he shrank from again subjecting himself to such a humiliation as he had encountered in London.

But Milly deceived others, as she in some way deceived herself; for under a stratum of pride lay her real nature, all cheerfulness, warmth, and kindness. She was intelligent too, and a well-read girl. She had a profound love of books, and her taste for ancient lore was not the least remarkable feature in her character. Thus she was wont to amuse the young officer with odd scraps of quaint information about Lewes and Brighton, Thaneshurst and other places; and he found himself letting his cigar get cold between his fingers, whilst he gazed into her soft dark eyes and animated face, and heard her telling of the Earls of Warren and the Priors of Lewes, of the Devil's Dyke and the Poynings,

who were lords of Poynings, with their famous ruby ring of inheritance; and so forth. Yet it suited her at times, when she felt piqued with her lover, to adopt a very different tone and manner; and of this he was unpleasantly conscious soon after the departure of Reynolds.

He had left Seymour's room, and to avoid Foxley, whose society he at no time desired, had strolled into the garden, and resting himself in the arbour, lit a cigar, and with its soothing aid, while half sunk in reverie, began to think over the whole situation and his chance of success with Milly, which, if ever again put to the issue, would require to be so ere long, as his leave of absence was fast coming to a close.

He suddenly became aware that Milly and Mabel, with Fanny Conyers, were in his vicinity. The girls, with their arms entwined in that loving way peculiar to many young ladies when no rivalry is at work, were promenading to and fro on the grass of the croquet ground, between which and the

arbour already mentioned there was a closely-clipped yew hedge, a relic of the older mansion of Thaneshurst. They were talking with gay anticipation of an archery meeting that was to take place somewhere, of Lincoln-green jackets and Robin Hood hats with *bersaglière* plumes, of the Hussar band, diamond prizes from Hunt and Roskell's, the luncheon from Fortnum and Mason's, and flirtation *ad libitum*.

‘These are all very well,’ said Milly after a pause; ‘but really I do not care to make the tips of my “fairy fingers” sore and my elbows weary by twanging a bow, when my arrows always go wide of the mark or vanish amid the gorse, and so forth. Tame as it is, I prefer croquet; it shows one’s skill in another way.’

‘And one’s insteps too, and the prettiness of our high-heeled boots,’ added Fanny Conyers.

‘Talking of croquet, we must have a regular match,’ said Milly Allingham. ‘I wish, Mabel, your mamma would ask the new

curate here, now that Val Reynolds has gone and the Hussars are so soon to move too.'

If aught in this speech could add to Stanley's pique, apart from calling Reynolds by his Christian name (which was so unlike her usual etiquette), it was the memory of a certain passage in Mabel's letter concerning the curate's admiration for her friend.

'Though only the curate, he is a man of very high family,' said Mabel, as her mamma's aristocratic proclivities occurred to her.

'There is to be service in the church this evening. Do let us drive over,' said Milly.

'But we seldom go to church in the evening,' urged Mabel.

'Well, dear, let us have the curate here,' said Milly, laughing. 'I must have an *attaché* of some kind, and now that Captain Reynolds has gone I shall certainly flirt with the curate.'

'Reynolds gone, the Hussars going; so now she must amuse herself with the curate. *I count for nothing*,' thought Stanley, with growing anger. 'She is a heartless coquette, and can neither care for me nor any man.'

He tossed aside his cigar, and, thinking he had overheard quite enough, walked softly away, little supposing that Milly was doing injustice to herself, and that all this was mere rantipole, if one may use such a phrase with reference to a girl like her; but ere many hours elapsed he found means to pique her most effectually in return.

It chanced that on this very evening tea had barely been brought into the drawing-room when the Reverend Alban Butterley was announced, and was welcomed with much *empressement* by all, and by Milly with more than she would have displayed if she had possessed the least idea that Stanley had overheard her.

After some inquiries regarding the progress of Tom Seymour towards recovery, the reverend gentleman seated himself beside Mrs. Brooke, and proceeded first to make himself especially agreeable to her. Stanley could see that he was a man not without several personal attractions, apart from his known eloquence, learning, and undoubtedly good

position. He was tall and well made, possessed a good figure and air of high breeding; but his eye was a roving and shifty one, that seldom looked at any one long. He was scrupulously well dressed, his white cravat—cut as like a Roman collar as might be—was tied to perfection, and he wore a long black frock-coat, serge waistcoat, and faultlessly-made patent boots. His hair was parted in the centre, he was closely shaven, and was the model of a drawing-room apostle; yet his presence failed to excite the least alarm or jealousy in the breast of Stanley, to whom he addressed most of his inquiries concerning the health of Tom Seymour.

‘I can assure you, Mr. Butterley,’ said Mrs. Brooke, ‘that Captain Stanley seems to make a most excellent nurse, from all I can hear.’

‘He has quite mistaken his profession, I think,’ added Mabel, with her eyes expressing intelligence and gratitude.

‘Nursing seems rather an unusual occupation for a young officer,’ said Mr. Butterley,

playing with his cup and spoon, and simpering like a genteel apostle.

‘Oh, not at all,’ urged Stanley. ‘When on service up country, I have often had to doctor, and nurse too, the sick—soldiers, their wives, and children—when in places where there were neither hospitals nor medical aid. When men died in their tents of cholera, sun-stroke, or jungle fever; and when they were buried, perhaps with only a blanket round them, in a trench close by, it fell to me to read the Burial Service over them.’

‘You must have seen much of suffering and death in that part of the world,’ said the Reverend Alban sententiously; ‘but man is born to sorrow, even as the sparks fly upward. Another cup; thanks, Miss Brooke.’

‘Yes, Mr. Butterley,’ said Mr. Brooke; ‘and I can assure you that this spill of my young friend Seymour has proved a deuced annoyance to an old fellow such as I, who now prefers port to burgundy after dinner, and a nap over the money article in my easy-chair.’

‘Just this month, about this very day two

years ago, a young brother officer died, I may almost say in my arms, under very gloomy circumstances,' said Stanley thoughtfully.

'And where was this?' asked Milly.

'In a land far, far away—a land almost unknown even by some in this country.'

As the preamble somewhat interested the ladies, Stanley was pressed to tell the story of his friend, and he frankly began at once, in the following words.

But Rowland Stanley was a fair specimen of a thorough-going, modest, and unpretending young English officer; thus he told his little narrative, all unconscious of the interest that having faced many perils in distant scenes gave him in the estimation of his fair audience.

CHAPTER XIV.

FROM BRIGHTON TO BHOTAN.

‘I HAVE but a simple story to tell you,’ he began, ‘with something of adventure but nothing of romance in it, though many thousands of miles distant, even as the crow flies, from the land of the South Downs and the region of Brighton. When our regiment was detailed as a portion of the field force under General Dunsford for service against the mau-rauding hill-tribes in Bhotan, we were placed in the column of Brigadier Mulcaster, and began our march in October, with orders to scour all that north-eastern quarter of India which extends from the southern declivities of the Himalaya range to the level ground which constitutes the northern boundary of the great valley of Assam, and to erect at certain places hill-forts or posts for the repression of the fierce Bhoteas, who had been making armed raids along our frontier and

carrying off people and cattle, as the Moss-troopers were wont to do on our Borders long ago.

‘It was likely to prove a perilous and arduous duty, but the scene of operations was new to us; we were all young, ardent, and eager for adventure; and so we marched into the mighty recesses of those vast mountain-ranges with hearty good-will.

‘I had in my company an ensign, a fine and handsome young lad, little more than a boy in fact, who was a great favourite with all, he was so sweetly-tempered and amiable, and yet withal so ardent and hazardous. “Little Wickets” we called him when he joined us fresh from Rugby, for he proved himself a prime bat and bowler, and speedily became captain of the regimental Eleven; and from the mess-table the sobriquet became known among the rank and file, who always spoke of him among themselves as “Little Mr. Wickets.”

‘The lad had one strong and firm feature in his character — an intense love for his

mother, and this pure sentiment kept him out of all the scrapes and follies in which our other youngsters were so prone to fall. Thus, though some of the subalterns were inclined to chaff Wickets for this, the sentiment—of which he never made any concealment—was ever commended by our seniors. When urged to bet, to gamble, to linger over his wine, or so forth, he invariably declined.

“Wickets, what a muff you are!” some one would say. “Why?”

“It would grieve my mother to think I did such things; moreover, I promised to her that I never would,” he would reply simply, and it seemed to me sweetly, heedless of the laughter he sometimes elicited; and when the lad spoke of his mother, who was far, far away in pleasant and peaceful Kent, as he often did to me when I became his chief chum and confidant, a chord came into his voice and his eyes lit up as if he was speaking of some young girl’s love; but that is a feeble tie when compared with the love of a mother.

‘After much toil, marching through jungles where only three miles’ progress might be made in a day, and where strong doses of quinine alone counteracted the effects of the malaria; or through primeval woods, the abode of the ounce, the barking deer, the horned yak, the tiger, and the leopard, and where the trees had stems like the Duke of York’s Column in diameter, and as lofty; through vast and long vistas of foliage where sunshine never penetrated, and where their depth and growth seemed to speak of centuries; where the wild rhododendrons seemed as rosy weeds; and after much severe fighting at times, especially at Julpigori, Ambiok, and in the Chamoorchee Pass, we found ourselves advancing to a place called Bishensing, where the feathery jungle grass grew so high that it quite concealed even the largest of our baggage elephants; everywhere erecting posts, leaving detachments, and making arrangements for the civil government of the newly-annexed territory by dividing it into districts under deputy commissioners, greatly to the disgust of the Bhoteas.

‘Though the latter seemed to be effectually quelled and quieted now, they were nevertheless making secret preparations for a combined attack upon the whole line of hill-posts we had established throughout their country.

‘My company formed a portion of the little garrison at a post called Dewangiri, under Colonel Campbell, who had also with him six companies of the Assam Light Infantry, a company of Roorkie Sappers, some artillery and Bengal police; and it was while stationed there that some singular circumstances occurred.

‘On the 1st of December we took up our quarters there, in a room of a stone-house that whilom had been the abode of a Lama priest, whom we ejected without much ceremony, and he departed, muttering vengeance, but chiefly against Wickets, whom he detected making a caricature of him with a burned stick on the whitewashed wall, portraying him with his long garments, goat-like beard, and high head-dress.

‘That night I was captain of the main-

guard, so Wickets had the room to himself, and, weary with our long march across the Berhampooter river, retired early to his camp charpoy or bed, and was soon—as he told me afterwards—sound asleep.

‘As the enemy were suspected of being in our vicinity, the inlying piquet, after parading at sunset, slept in their clothing and accoutrements, and I had to visit my sentinels almost hourly to see that they were on the alert. About midnight, lingeringly, with a cigar in my mouth, I was returning from this duty, and I remember being on this occasion rather disposed to pause and survey the mountain scenery of the Himalayas, so varied and magnificent, with sharp and pointed peaks that soar sublimely from their vast and lofty bases.

‘By day the size of these stupendous mountains, their apparently endless extent, the clearness of their most distant outlines against the pale-blue sky, make a scene of wild and wonderful beauty; but at midnight, as I saw them then, when myriads of diamond-like stars were twinkling in a sky whose blue

depths were almost black, the pale snowy cones had an aspect of sublimity without parallel, and still grander becomes the effect when the first light of dawn tips these summits with fire, while darkness yet reigns in the distant plains and valleys of Assam.

‘As I turned away, the għurrie, or little gong at the main-guard, proclaimed midnight, and the last stroke had scarcely died away when I heard a succession of pistol-shots, a shout of pain; and two men, who dropped from the window of my quarters in the house of the Lama priest, fled past me like hares, and vanished in the distance.

‘Accompanied by some of the guard, I drew my sword and proceeded with lights to the room, where we found Wickets in a high state of excitement in his night-dress, with a recently-discharged revolver in his hand, and several marks of blood were visible on the floor and the sill of the open window from which I had seen the men drop.

‘When I dismissed the guard and he became more composed, he told me that he had

just had a singular dream, in which he saw two men, of whom one was the Lama priest, armed each with a khandjur or Indian dagger, which he knew by instinct to be poisoned, enter the room stealthily by raising the green jealousy of the window. He saw with terrible distinctness their dark visages, their fierce gleaming eyes and white glistening teeth, but heard not a sound, so soft and muffled were all their movements, and snake-like or Thug-like mode of approaching him.

‘To add to the horror and misery of the crisis, while perspiration rolled over his temples, he felt as if deprived of all power of volition, and was unable to find the revolver, which, like all the rest of us, he kept loaded beneath his pillow. Another moment and he knew the poniards would be in his throat and heart. But a voice—a voice he could not fail to recognise—the voice of his mother, yet sounding strangely and seeming to come as if from a vast distance, cried:

‘“God aid my poor boy, or he will perish!”

‘Then the spell seemed to break ; he awoke, grasped his pistol, and started up to see dimly through the mosquito curtains of his charpoy the very men of his dream close by.

“I fired all the barrels in succession, Stanley, giving three shots to each, Stanley,” said he, still all but breathless with fierce excitement, “and I must surely have winged at least one. Look at the blood there.”

“How can these fellows have eluded my sentries?” said I.

“But about my mother’s voice. Was it not odd, Stanley?”

“A dream ; and in danger you naturally thought of her.”

‘But more odd did we think this episode when the next mail brought a letter from his mother to little Wickets, who showed it to me only. It was dated on the *first* day of the new year, and described a painful dream she had on the preceding night, in which she had seen him in his sleep in a strange place, and on the point of assassination by two natives, one of whom wore a high head-dress, a long

beard, and robe; and that in her terror a cry to heaven escaped her, so loud and piercing that she had roused all the household, and she concluded by imploring him to write or telegraph from the nearest station without delay, which we immediately did.

“But what *are* we to think of this strange double dream, Stanley?” he said more than once, after long thought.

“I think we should say nothing about it to any of ours or of the Assam corps,” said I, “lest they take to chaffing you as a dreamer and ghost-seer.”

‘But I must own the coincidence startled me till I had other things to think of, when, at dawn on the morning of the day I shall long remember, a sudden uproar in the midst of the cantonment roused all to arms—all at least save poor little Wickets, who was stricken down with fever, and had been on the sick-list for a week past. In the dark a body of Bhotanese had stolen past our sentinels and commenced with sharp swords and axes to slash through the tent-ropes, while making a gene-

ral attack on the inmates with matchlocks, arrows, and slings.

“Stand to your arms—fall in! Gunners, stand by your guns! Limber up!”

Such were the shouts on every hand as we scrambled into our ranks in the gloom and obscurity; and while the Eurasian artillery rushed to their cannon, we, assisted by the inlying piquet, commenced rapid and independent file-firing in the direction where we supposed the Bhotanese to be, by the noise of their yells and by the red flashes of their clumsy old matchlocks through the gray morning haze. We kept them effectually in check, and as soon as the light was sufficiently in and their exact position ascertained, Colonel Campbell, who, like many others, was suffering from fever, charged them at once with the 43rd and ours, and drove them completely off; but not before—led by the Lama priest in person—they made a vigorous attempt to storm his stone-house, in which were our quarters, and the key to the position. We had a vast number killed and wounded, in-

cluding Lieutenants Story and Urquhart, the latter mortally by a jingal ball, which severed his femoral artery.

‘ Inspired by the shouts, the din, and the firing, young Wickets, half dressed, had rushed out sword in hand, but only to be borne back to bed more feeble than ever; and when I returned that night from an expedition on which I had been sent in vain, to protect a bamboo aqueduct which supplied us with water, and which the Lama priest contrived to destroy, I found my little subaltern in a deplorable state. We had so effectually drubbed the enemy that we had peace for some days after this, and I was at leisure to attend to the sick boy—for he was, as I have said, a mere boy, but a genuine plucky English one.

‘ On my return from the front, when ascending to the room occupied by Wickets and me, I was met by our doctor, with a very perplexed and perturbed expression in his face.

‘ “ How is your patient, doctor?” I asked.

‘ “ Ill, indeed, and quite delirious, and I feel inclined to become so too.”

““Why, Crawford?”

““I can scarcely explain—I am so bewildered—but seem to have seen a ghost!”

““Seem to have seen a ghost!” I repeated, but without a smile, as I feared that our surgeon—a grave, sensible, and hard-working medical officer—was becoming, like many others, a victim of the grim fever king, whose abode was among the pestilent jungles there.

““Listen to me,” said he, drawing me apart. “All yesterday and all last night poor Wickets has been raving, calling out at times and weeping for his mother, more like a very child than the gallant lad who led the skirmishers through the Chamoorchee Pass.”

““He is intensely attached to her, I know, and she to him.”

““He has a photo of her under his pillow, and the likeness between them is marvellous; and though worn by age, her features are remarkably beautiful, pale, and regular,” added Crawford, with a shudder.

““What is the matter with you, Crawford?” I inquired, with growing interest.

“ The boy had replaced the photo under his pillow, and as I retired to the table to make up a draught for him, I saw there was stealing over his face that strange beauty which belongs not to earth; it was the calm, the sublime expression of those who have got their ‘letter of readiness’ for another world than this. Then I heard him saying, in a low caressing voice, ‘Mother dear, do give me something to moisten my lips; put your cool hand on my temples. I am your own little boy again, who will never, never leave you, mother; and we shall be long, long together now.’

“ I was about to approach him with the draught when I dropped the cup in terror and dismay. Disbelieve me if you will, Stanley, but do not mock me, when I tell you that, plainly as I now see you face to face, I saw bending over *his* bed, the wretched charpoy of canes, the figure of an elegant woman, with her face of wonderful brightness, her eyes full of a sublimity, a sweetness, and loving expression beyond my power of description; and I

had only time to recognise in her the woman of the photograph, his mother, when the phantom, the spirit, or whatever it was, faded away."

‘Even while Crawford spoke there were drops of perspiration on his brow, and he added,

“I was so awe-struck that, but for the entrance of a hospital orderly, I believe that I should have fainted; but say nothing of all this to any one, I beg of you.”

‘I then told him of Wickets’ dream, and how he had escaped assassination the very moment he imagined that he heard his mother’s voice.

“All this is passing strange,” said he after a pause, in which he took some brandy-pawnee; “we can only refer it to coincidence, or that school of physics which is kept alive by tradition, and which, for lack of a better term, we call *animal magnetism*.”

‘Then, as if to explain what he had seen, or fancied he had seen, rather to himself than to me, he talked, as the Scots, like the Ger-

mans, sometimes do, a deal about the wonderful fibre of physiological relations (whatever that may mean), and the manifestations of a Power that has in view ends far higher, keener, and more beautiful than we could see.

‘Certainly I could not see it; but the episode, so recent, enhanced the interest I felt on entering the room where our young friend lay dying among strangers, so far, far away from his English home and all its English surroundings, the beloved Absalom of his mother; and this thought came strongly upon me as I drew near him in that dingy impromptu barrack-room.

‘The furniture there was his camp-bed on one side, mine on the other, with a board-ship washing-stand which had served us both. In one corner stood some red Kedgeree pots for bathing purposes; in another some bottles rolled up in wet straw to keep the contents cool; a couple of bullock trunks, swords and revolver cases, with cheroot boxes, were the rest of the furniture. On the table were vials, some linen soiled and stained with blood, a

plate of salt for disgorging leeches, some soda-water bottles, a quantity of rich brown curly hair, recently shorn from the head of the sufferer, the unfortunate fever-stricken lad, whose once round cheeks were hollow and ghastly now, whose head had been shaven by Crawford close to the scalp, and whose pale temples were spotted with red leech-marks.

‘Though “there was but one step between him and death now” he was quite composed, and greeted me with a smile as I took his hand in mine when Crawford left us.

‘“I am going home, Stanley. I am going home, old fellow. Give me a drink, please. Thanks. Ah, it is some of Crawford’s nasty stuff ; he might give me bitter beer, as it matters little what I take *now*.” After a pause he added, in full corroboration of Crawford’s story, “I have had such a delightful dream about poor mother. I saw her *so* vividly, *so* distinctly, and with a sweet smile on her face *as she bent over me, with her hands on my brow*; and after kissing me she glided softly away. I hope to have such a dream again. And you

licked those beggars at the aqueduct? How I wish I had been with you! though as sub, I am always content to play Horatio to your Hamlet, Stanley."

‘Then his mind began to wander again, and with the full memory of Crawford’s recent communication before me, I sat—a little nervously I must admit—in the watches of the night, listening to the delirious mutterings of the dying lad, who seemed to *see* some one that I could not see, and to converse with one whose responses I could not hear.

‘So the metal gurries clanged, the reliefs went round from time to time, and the hot hours of the breathless Indian night stole on; while occasionally I could hear the strange howl of the wild dog, and the cry of the kyang or wild ass in the adjacent jungles. Fitful lights seemed to gleam redly out of the darkness too; but whether they were fire-flies close by, or torches lit by the Bhotanese in the distance, I was too preoccupied to consider or care about them.

‘He often imagined himself in the playing-

fields at Rugby; then he would talk to his sisters, and ever and anon, in fancy and in the most endearing terms, to his mother, telling her that she was an angel of goodness, and if he went to heaven it would be through her merits and not his own.

‘He seemed totally unconscious of my presence, and, somewhat hardened though I was by field service, I felt how painful it must be, even to accustomed watchers of the sick, as a writer says, “when *the mind wanders*—when the soul goes on some wild journey of its own, away from direct human association, yearning for impossible delights, living among flickering shadows, distorted and amazing pictures that have their origin in some faint magic-lantern of past or present life—when the eyes look at you and do not know you, is there any human sensation of fear that equals the heart-throb that beats under those glances?”

‘At last there stole over his face that weird and wistful look which comes only *once* in life—the expression of the death that is so close—the last long earnest glance that is given, as

the tongue and lips become powerless and mute, unable to tell either of love, of sorrow, or of repentance. It has been my chance, by land and sea, to behold death in many shapes—in every stage of pain and fear—in all that can render it terrible; but that poor boy's end affected me keenly. Just as the morning gun pealed through the cantonment, and when the white peaks of the Himalayas gleamed like cones of fire against the dark-blue sky, the poor lad expired; and as our post was to be abandoned in haste, no time was lost in having him interred. The hospital orderlies rolled him in blankets, his mother's miniature was placed in his breast by Crawford's directions, and just as the sun rose we buried him amid a clump of giant rhododendrons, and I read the funeral service. We had not a firing party, for gunpowder was scarce, like the other good things of this world, at Dewangiri.

‘So severely were we pressed by the enemy, and the general failing to send us succour, we abandoned the post at nightfall, and began our retreat towards the plains of Assam by the

Libra Pass ; and as we entered it, I remember looking sadly back to the grave where our young comrade lay, and thinking how solemn and lonely was such a tomb ; and so, while the planets and the great moon, clear and silvery, came out of the blue depths of the Indian sky to shine over vast tracts of jungle, where the tiger and wild ass lurked, over the domes of Bhotan temples, rivers, and green wildernesses, to us unknown, we pushed on our retreat, which became a calamitous one. When the moon waned and darkness came amid the wildest and most stupendous mountain scenery in the world, a panic somehow seized our men.

‘ The column lost its way, confusion ensued, and the wounded were left behind to the mercy of the Bhotanese.

‘ The guns were next abandoned, as the Eurasians were unable to drag them ; so they were flung down a *khud*, as those tremendous ravines of the Himalayas are named. Our rear-guard kept up a brisk fire on the Bhotanese, who replied heavily with matchlocks, jingals, and arrows. So many of our fellows

were hit that, without the fear of being knocked on the head, one could not help speculating on the chances of coming out of the field with the regulation number of human limbs; but after the Lama priest—who was foremost in the fray—was shot down, we were allowed to continue our way unmolested.

‘But I am diverging from my story. Two months afterwards, when we were cantoned at the foot of the hills, Crawford entered my tent.

‘“You remember the night when little Wickets died,” said he, “and all that occurred?”

‘“But too well,” I replied.

‘“Well, here is a letter for him, which I opened *ex officio* as an executor. It is from the curate of their place in Kent, and it would seem that, on the very night and at the very hour he died, *his mother died too.*”

‘“Another most singular coincidence!” I exclaimed. “Poor little Wilmot!”’

‘Who did you say?’ cried Miss Conyers, in a very startled voice, as her eyes filled with tears.

Now Stanley had gradually been becoming conscious, while proceeding with his simple little story, that the soft eyes of Fanny and her sister had been fixed on him with a concern more deep and eager than it seemed to merit; but he had 'scored it down' to the interest that girls usually take in red coats and all the adventures of the wearers thereof.

'O Captain Stanley, *who* did you say?' she repeated.

'Wilmot—Bob Wilmot, whom the mess called Wickets.'

'Of the —th Regiment?'

'Yes; I was then in that corps.'

'Oh, sir, he was our only brother!' exclaimed the two girls at once.

'Your brother, Miss Conyers!'

'We have since taken that name from an uncle; that of our family is Wilmot. We were at school in Brussels when all these things you have related took place: we only heard vaguely that poor Bob had died somewhere "up country."'

'He often mentioned a sister whom he

loved very dearly; but I never could catch her name in his mutterings.'

'Twas I,' said Fanny sadly; 'we were nearly of an age, and were great companions. How can we thank you for all the tender commiseration and more than brotherly kindness you have unconsciously told us our poor boy received at your hands! Oh, that dear mamma were alive to thank you!' exclaimed the girl, while choked in tears she took Stanley's hand in hers and, somewhat to his confusion, kissed it.

'How very romantic—quite touching, in fact!' was the sneering comment of Alf Foxley, who stood with his back to the mantelpiece, regarding the scene with a twinkle in his shifty eyes, and genuinely astonished to see that tears were dimming the eyes of Mabel in sympathy with her friend.

'And you—aw—read the Burial Service?' lisped the Reverend Alban Butterley, lying back in his chair, with the tips of his white fingers meeting prayerfully, as if he very much pitied the poor Christian who had it done by

one perhaps so unworthy. But Stanley merely bowed to the well-bred 'apostle,' and wondered how his reverence might have read it while within reach of the jagged bullets and poisoned arrows of the Bhotanese.

Fanny Conyers seemed to feel something of this too, for after his departure she said smilingly to Stanley: 'Mr. Butterley is a most agreeable clergyman, who—though you will never meet him, like some, riding straight in the hunting-field, at cover, or shooting well on the 1st—excels in the mild excitements of croquet and afternoon tea.'

Little Fanny Conyers was a taking creature, winning in manner and attractive in person, with bright laughing hazel eyes, cheeks round and soft as peaches, with three dimples, one in each and one in her chin, veritable *fossettes d'amour*, that seemed to invite the lips of those who looked on them; and these won for her the name of 'Dimples' from Foxley, in his saucy way, when among men in the smoking-room or elsewhere.

Stanley, somewhat touched by her emotion

and the joint interest so suddenly awakened in each other, making them seem quite old friends in fact, gazed more particularly on Fanny, and began to discover that her soft lash-shadowed eyes of golden hazel were full of beauty, and that her neck, on which her handsome head was so perfectly poised, was fair and slender.

‘By Jove!’ thought he, ‘but poor Wicket’s sister *is* a deuced pretty girl, with something almost infantine in the innocence of her expression and manner.’

Perhaps the *empressement* with which the lovely lips had touched his hand was influencing our officer, who was not displeased to detect a gathering cloud in the eyes of Milly Allingham. All that evening, and repeatedly on the following, the two sisters in general, but Fanny in particular, monopolised Stanley, they naturally had so much to ask and to hear; and to Milly it seemed that with wonderful rapidity ‘they had become frightfully intimate;’ and from that time her bearing seemed alternately to be colder, haughtier, and prouder than ever.

Was she jealous of little Fanny and all her *spirituelle* ways?

Rowland Stanley, in somewhat of a vengeful spirit, certainly hoped so, and yet she was often so prettily petulant that Stanley's heart beat happily at the prospect of taming her or luring her like a love-bird to her cage.

CHAPTER XV.

COUSIN ALF MAKES UP HIS MIND.

MATTERS were still in the balance between our military hero and the object of his wishes; but the tables were somewhat turned on the latter now. Her supposed admirer, Reynolds, was gone. Rowland Stanley seemed rather to affect Fanny Conyers, who coquettishly sang to him more than once in her clear bird-like voice,

‘He thinks I do not love him,’

and it was especially provoking to see them acting charades with great piquancy and *empressement*.

Fanny Conyers clung much to Stanley now: she had a hundred questions to ask concerning her dead brother, and confidences to make. Friendship with a girl so attractive was perilous work, and but for the preoccupation of his heart he might have found in

her an excellent counterfoil for the real or pretended indifference of Milly Allingham. Though conscious of the advantage perhaps to be derived from her growing pique, he had no desire to widen the kind of breach between himself and the latter.

‘Is it platonic affection that is springing up between them?’ she asked herself. ‘No; I am not idiot enough to believe in that. It never existed genuinely between even the married, and is not likely to do so in this instance.’ So Milly *was* restless, for, though she would not acknowledge it even to herself, he had established an *influence* over her.

She had failed to have even the curate, Alban Butterley, for an *attaché* as she had said, that reverend personage having to visit town on some prolonged clerical business; and save when some of the Hussars, especially Larkspur, with his turfy talk and *Bell's-Life* phrases, rode out from Brighton to leave their cards for Seymour, she began to think Thaneshurst somewhat of a ‘slow’ place after all, and her thoughts began to flit after her mother to Wies-

baden and the daily and nightly gaieties of the Kursaal; for there now in the *salons*, where *rouge-et-noir* and *roulette* emptied the pockets of many, the dancers whirl in the waltz, and in the lovely gardens, where the losers blew out their brains, flirtation to any amount is in full progress, with all 'the subtlety imported by the experience of the season' in London or at Berlin.

She felt in her heart that she admired no man more than she did Rowland Stanley. How different he was from empty Val Reynolds, with his namby-pamby well-bred talk, and from most of the other men she had met in that mystic circle called 'society'! How much more interesting, anecdotal, and engrossing! She was charmed with everything he talked about, particularly his Indian reminiscences. But then Fanny Conyers was enchanted with them too; and Milly most seriously wished that the episode of 'Little Wickets' had never come on the *tapis*.

Besides, Stanley, popular everywhere, was especially so among the little circle at Thanes-

hurst. Dr. Clavicle and Alban Butterley considered him quite intellectual, wonderfully *so* for a soldier. Then why had she refused him? And now his leave of absence would soon be coming to an end. He had already hinted that he would be going soon after a ball that was to be given by the Hussars.

Cousin Alf about this time made up his mind.

If he had a genuine fancy in this world, it was for Aimée de Bohun. With her saucy fast ways, her cigarettes, her sealskin jacket and made-up masses of golden hair; her chaffing conversation, often bordering on slang; her green-room anecdotes and raffish companions,—albeit she was such a lovely-looking creature, with all her ‘making-up,’ she was much more his style of woman than Mabel Brooke. But Mabel’s money was to him her greatest attraction, and he had all the prestige of cousinship, combined with his uncle’s great regard for him, on which to base his hopes of success, could Seymour be put aside or weeded out of her head and heart.

Moreover, her money would enable him to keep secretly 'on the square' with Aimée; for he knew many a fellow in town who found it very pleasant to serve 'under two flags.' His ideas were very extravagant, his habits luxurious, and money was thus an imperious necessity with him.

Foxley, now that his fit of alarm had subsided and Tom Seymour was slowly progressing towards convalescence, felt his old rancorous hate return in all its strength, with a regret that in 'the spill' at the lane his rival had not received some almost mortal injury—something more serious anyway than a dislocated shoulder. If he feared and detested him before, he detested and feared him more than ever now. 'Conscience makes cowards of us all;' but conscience did not quite make one of Alf Foxley, though the police might.

He had hoped to bring ridicule, contempt, suffering, and mutilation upon Tom. Now all the deep-laid scheme, so carefully and secretly carried out, had only ended in making him an object of deeper solicitude to Mabel and of

interest to all—to all at least except Mrs. Brooke.

When he occasionally visited the invalid, how little could the latter, or the gallant and soldierly Stanley, guess the secret and real thoughts of his heart! Yet he would say, cheerily and kindly to all appearance, while seeking to hide a secret undercurrent of ill-veiled suspicion, knowledge, and reserve:

‘Glad to see you looking so well, old fellow. Smoke, Seymour, smoke; you are dying for a cheroot. Ah, your game arm! Allow me to apply the light for you;’ and so forth.

‘Every one is very attentive to me,’ said Seymour, speaking with an effort.

‘Old Clavicle, “my dear sir,” to use his own perpetual phrase, is certainly pulling you through, though he is only one of the red-lamp-and-vaccination-gratis lot of sawbones; yet he is a wonderful fellow, Clavicle; clear-sighted; can see his way through a millstone, uncle Brooke says. Yet I saw a fellow get a worse spill than you some weeks ago.’

‘Where?’

‘At Brighton races. I was then escorting Mabel, of course, on Reynolds’s drag :

“And there on a high box-seat we sat,
Together my last beloved and I ;
My gaze was fixed on her dainty hat,
And hers was bent on the wine hard by.”

As he sang this verse, Stanley and Seymour exchanged a covert smile, and the upper lip of the latter quivered with anger, though he cared little for the *insouciance* of Foxley now. And often, when all were abed and probably asleep, Tom would lie awake for hours, while the clock on the mantelpiece ticked monotonously and the night-light in a Bohemian-glass vase shed rays of feeble light that made the shadows in his room seem ghastly. But he thought of Mabel with a delight that bordered upon rapture and love —the love he could return so freely; and he strove in vain to dream of her, as the charm of her presence was there, for Mr. Mulbery had informed him that the room had once been hers; thus, perhaps, her soft and peach-like cheek had pressed the very pillow upon

which he now lay ; and the last nightly murmur on his lips was ever of her.

In his ardour he felt that, even were he to die of his injuries, Mabel's love for him would soften the terrors of death. But there was no fear of the latter ; he felt himself languid indeed, but daily growing stronger, and with health would come departure and separation.

Though his rival, Foxley, laughed in his heart at what he termed 'the superstition of matrimony,' in the present instance he made up his mind to adopt it.

'By Jove!' thought he, 'I'll make my running while the course is free and she is no longer under the immediate influence of that cad's society, the despatch-box and red-tape quill-driver. To-morrow I shall propose to Mabel, come what may. Mere hints, like some I have given, won't do now,' he exclaimed aloud, while surveying himself in the mirror and performing heavily, almost viciously, on his somewhat obstinate red hair with a pair of ivory-handled brushes.

Foxley had gone in for a heavier book than usual upon certain races. To use his own phraseology, he had 'put a pot of money on three good platers, one of which came in second, the others nowhere; so he would propose for Mabel in form. Nunký Brooke was a kind old pump and would back him up to any amount, as all was yet kept dark about Aimée and her brougham.'

Accordingly next day, when luncheon was over and the family circle was separating, he followed Mabel into the library, whither, luckily for his purpose, she had gone alone in search of a book, and without much preamble, in an anxious and exceedingly clumsy way, he asked her to be his wife, adding that he was sure such a union would give satisfaction to both families—to uncle Brooke especially.

We shall not detail this interview, save in so far as to say that Mabel, though irritated and yet excessively amused, was not surprised, as much of cousin Alf's previous line of conduct had led her to expect the declaration he had just made.

‘Please, Alf, don’t make a fool of yourself, and never speak on this subject to me again. It is impossible ; and though I can never, never love you in the fashion you wish, I know you too well to think that you will act “the blighted being” in consequence of my most decided rejection.’

Extricating her right hand, of which he had possessed himself, she forgot all about the book for which she had come ; and leaving Alfred Foxley with unuttered curses on his quivering lips—describing her as ‘a cursed hard nut to crack, a fool,’ and so forth, ‘only fit for Hanwell !’—ran laughingly and yet with a palpitating heart out of the library. Foxley’s declaration and proposal failed to excite either gratitude or pity, even in the smallest degree, in the heart of Mabel. Five words will explain this.

With all her beauty and charms of manner *he did not love her*,—in truth he loved no one but himself,—and hence the true ring of passion was not in his voice when he addressed her. He had no love for her, but he would

have had a great deal of pride in presenting such a wife to the world on one hand, while seeking, no doubt in vain, to make the fair Aimée believe that he had been compelled by circumstances, his father's will and so forth, to marry her.

Pausing at the door of the conservatory, and fearing he might follow her and renew the scene in the library, she pondered over her cousin's abrupt proposal, and thought tenderly of the poor fellow up-stairs to whom she had given her whole heart—her own gentle-voiced and gentle-eyed Tom; and at the moment Milly joined her.

‘Mabel darling,’ exclaimed the latter, surveying her with some surprise, ‘why are you so agitated?’

‘O Milly, how can I tell you?’ said Mabel, with a little hysterical laugh. ‘I have just had a proposal!’

‘A proposal?’

‘Yes; and you will never guess from whom.’

‘Not from—from Captain Stanley?’ she

asked, with a too palpable change of colour.

‘Oh, fie, no, Milly !’

‘From whom, then ?’

‘Cousin Alf.’

‘And you accepted him ! Then I shall figure as a bridesmaid. But what about poor Mr. Seymour ?’

‘Milly, how can you jest so ! But come this way ; here is Captain Stanley, and I am so excited,’ she added, putting an arm round the waist of her friend, who said, laughing,

‘As for me, I shall not think of matrimony till I am spoken of as a *ci-devant* pretty woman—for I daresay I *am* pretty—reduced, as Miss Pardoe says, to a *tour de tête* and metallic teeth.’

And as they passed into the conservatory, Stanley, while approaching, heard the mocking surmise, which he knew well was meant for his particular ear.

‘I do hope Alf won’t worry me again !’ exclaimed Mabel, as she rehearsed to her friend all he had said. But Alf made all

his arrangements, ordered Pupkins to have the mail-phaeton ready, Mulbery to have his traps packed, was off from Thaneshurst before his absence at the dinner-table was remarked, and took the evening train to town to visit *la belle* Aimée, promising his uncle, however, to be back in time for the 1st of September, leaving—he thought of it with double hate and fury—the field entirely to Tom Seymour.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW MR. BROOKE BLUNDERED.

ALF was gone now; his gray-green or neutral-tinted eyes—how well she remembered their fierce expression in the library!—were no longer there to watch her when she lay in wait for Dr. Clavicle—in wait so slyly, dear girl!—to ask with an air of carelessness, to conceal her affectionate interest, about the progress of his patient day by day, for now her whole soul was absorbed in the sufferings of Tom Seymour.

Her favourite flowers in the conservatory were forgotten now; her pet love-birds that were wont to feed from her rosy lips and nestle in her white bosom—reminding one of Greuze's famous picture—were left to the care of Polly Plum, her maid; and her favourite pad, which was wont to whinny over her

shoulder, follow her like a spaniel, and daily look for a tiny feed of corn from the velvet palm of her little hand, had to content him with the care of Pupkins alone, that paragon of bandy-legged grooms, for Mabel had a special care now that filled her anxious heart.

She abandoned herself to her love, wilfully, as it were, with eyes half-closed, striving to forget that which could not be forgotten, and seeking hard—oh, so hard, poor girl!—to teach herself that, by not looking destiny too steadily in the face, a time would come when her parents might allow her to become the happy little wife of Tom Seymour.

How she longed to take the place—but that was not to be thought of for a moment—of the cold-hearted and methodical yet fussy professional nurse whom Dr. Clavicle had provided for Tom, and whom she was quite convinced must be a genuine ‘Mrs. Gamp;’ but when, accompanied by her father and Stanley, poor Mabel *did* see her lover, all pillow'd and propped up for the occasion, she was shocked to behold the change in him as she took in

hers his thin and wasted hand, he looked so ghastly and white, his rich brown hair was shorn short, and his handsome moustache and beard clipped quite close.

She shrunk back timidly too, as the avowal she had made on the day of the catastrophe made her very reserved, for the great secret of each heart was known to the other now.

‘O papa, he looks frightful!’ she exclaimed with an irrepressible sob, after they withdrew.

‘Can he—will he live?’

‘Live? of course he will! Tom is one of those tough fellows that don’t die easily,’ replied the old gentleman cheerily. ‘What a kind little puss you are to be affected so! But before a week is over you may give him a drive round the park in your pony-carriage.’

‘O papa, but mamma mayn’t approve.’

‘I know she wouldn’t; but I’ll take the blame, and choose a day when she is at a Dorcas meeting or some such thing. Why should not we be all kind to the poor fellow—old Tom Seymour’s son? Lord, girl! when I

think of the games Tom and I used to have when we were in old Scrawl's office in Birch Lane !'

Consequently, a few days after Tom was convalescent—able to be 'up and about,' as Dr. Clavicle had it—Mr. Brooke ordered the pony-carriage from the stables. Tom was handed therein by Stanley, and with Mabel, blushing under her veil, as a charioteer—blushing at her own thoughts and the whole situation—he departed for a little drive at a time when Mrs. Brooke and her three young visitors had gone with the carriage to the Pavilion at Brighton, and also to get some minor requisites for the forthcoming Hussar ball, and ere their return the *result* of what she would have termed 'Mr. Brooke's blundering arrangement' was accomplished.

Both at first, though their hearts were beating lightly with the purest happiness, were somewhat silent for a little space; and after the beauty of the day, the loveliness of the grass and trees, the mildness of the air, and the easy action of the pony-phaeton had

been fully admitted, it became necessary to talk of something *else*.

Tom thought he had never seen Mabel look more lovely ; her colour was heightened, and there was a shy glance in her eyes that enhanced their beauty of expression. She was, as usual, most becomingly dressed in morning costume, with perfectly-fitting driving-gloves, the daintiest of hats on her pretty head, with a ruby-coloured drooping feather that at times swept the cheek of Tom as the wind waved it, and her veil was tied under her chin—the fashion then ; but by the time they had gone twice round the park it had somehow been loosened, no doubt that she might converse with more ease.

Tom Seymour began rapidly to feel the impossibility of not referring to the subject with which his heart was full.

‘It was so kind of you to—to grieve for me so when my horse threw me,’ said he.

‘How could any one fail to grieve?’ she answered, blushing deeply ; ‘it was a terrible time !’

‘A sweet time to me, Mabel. I called you Mabel then; oh, let me do so now—now and for ever!’

‘Tom!’

Her head fell on his shoulder, and the wind blew up her veil, and a blindness seemed to come over Tom as his lip met hers. In day-dreams and night-dreams how often had he thought of and longed for the time when they might—as I think it is a song has it—

‘In one long, long and loving kiss
Concentrate all love’s ling’ring bliss.’

And now the time had come.

They were very silent those two, for with all the joy of the present they could not shut their eyes to the doubt and gloom of the future, after a time; but at first, entranced in love, they were forgetful of all the world—of all and everything but themselves and the wild joy of the time—a time, alas, too brief and fleeting.

The reins had fallen on the backs of the ponies, who jogged on unguided through the leafy dingles of the wooded chase, and ulti-

mately, ere Mabel roused herself and remembered where she was, they had stopped and betaken themselves to quietly cropping the herbage, as well as their bridle-bits would permit them.

Rapture and weakness, consequent to his recent suffering, filled the eyes of Seymour with tears as he gazed from time to time into the calm, loving, and candid orbs of Mabel, and felt that she was his own Mabel now.

‘My own—my own, and I have won you at last!’ exclaimed he in a low voice, as he caressed her face between his hands.

‘Tom—Tom, I do love you very dearly. I always loved you, and, amid my terror in the lane on that dreadful day, the—the secret escaped me. How strange, Tom, to think that the first declaration should come from *me!*’ she added, with a blushing smile that was delightfully shy and coy.

And this was the dear and candid girl that he had often heard Val Reynolds and others aver in their parlance ‘was meant for some big fish,’ she whose face now nestled in his neck.

After a time Mabel began to remember that which Seymour had forgotten—that some eyes unseen might be upon them. She resumed her parasol-whip and reins, and again the pony-phaeton made the circuit of the park, the very stateliness of which brought practically home to poor Tom the rashness of the love to which they had abandoned themselves; and they began to talk, not always as young people in the noon and flush of love will talk of their past hopes and fears or their present joy, but of plans for their desperate future—a future to be passed in eternal celibacy, of course, if the Fates—*i.e.* Mr. and Mrs. John Brooke—were unkind.

Stanley, with Miss Allingham and the Miss Conyers, could be seen at intervals, through openings in the coppice, at croquet on the sunny lawn before the house. The drive was fortunately over before ‘mamma,’ who had returned, knew precisely where Mabel was, and when she reined up at the *porte-cochère* she absolutely fled to her own

room, and a valet gave Tom the assistance of an arm to his ; but there was a strong expression of timid consciousness in Mabel's face that day, and she quailed under the scrutinising glance of her mother while nervously discussing the forthcoming Hussar ball, what was to be worn, and who were sure to be there.

When the usual time came for the ladies to retire to the drawing-room, Mabel put her arm round the waist of her friend, and said,

‘Kiss me, Milly darling; I am so happy !’

Then Milly by these words knew *all*.

Already had Tom's engagement-ring—one that had been his mother's—encircled her ‘engaged finger’—the fourth, as the thumb always counts one in arranging this mysterious hoop; but Mabel had to wear her glove over it or otherwise conceal it among her many rings from ‘mamma.’ As for Mr. Brooke, honest man, he was ignorant of such vanities.

And now, after the late tumult of happy

thought, as Tom lay, feverish and weak—for he had used his lame arm more than *usual* during the drive—on the sofa in his room, came the time for agitating reflection. Love had been mutually avowed and promises of faith exchanged, beyond a doubt; but how would all this end?

Ay, there was the rub!

Her parents—their consent was so hopeless of attainment; and he thought they might with justice bitterly accuse him of treachery and abuse of their hospitality in obtaining the love of their daughter unknown to them. And he thought, moreover, this guileless fellow, oh, were Mabel only poor, or had she never known such wealth, even with his small means (and those vast resources in the future peculiar always to youth), how happy could they be in some snug little rose-covered cottage at Richmond or Staines, Brixton or anywhere else. Hopes and dreams embodied their waking life, a life of joy; and how pleasant would be even the dull routine of office work, when he knew that on returning

Mabel's face would meet him smiling at the garden-gate!

Dreams, dreams, as yet!

Mrs. Brooke took especial good care that there should be no more work with the pony-phaeton, in spite of her husband's reiterated assertions that it 'done Tom so much good, that drive had;' and from that day he recovered so fast that Dr. Clavicle's professional visits ceased. He little knew that one smile from Mabel Brooke, one glance of her magnetic eye, or one touch of her pretty hand, were worth all the specifics in the London *Pharmacopœia*.

The contents of the last box from Mudie's (like the best flowers in the garden) were always culled for Tom, who knew precisely the passages which Mabel's pencil had marked for his attention. Ere long he was allowed to descend to the drawing-room, where she could shed the light of her beauty, her sweetness, and tenderness around him, and play and sing to him, while they strove to shut their eyes to the fact that he must leave her some day,

and the delicious present would irrevocably become the *past*.

So Foxley had brought about a *dénouement* he could not have anticipated, and the end of which he could not foresee.

CHAPTER XVII.

STANLEY'S RESOLVE.

AND now came the 1st of September, the day but one before the military ball. Badenoch, Larkspur, and others were coming to Thaneshurst, but Tom had no fear of rivalry with any one, whatever Stanley might have. And Alfred Foxley also came, with a fresh batch of photos of Aimée to be admired in secret, and with pleasant recollections of jolly but rather expensive dinners at Richmond, Star-and-Garter luncheons, and picnics with 'fast' people on the river, or tiny dinners with her and some others of the ballet at the Welsh Harp, with 'dry fizz,' a cutlet or so, and cucumber cut as thin as a gossamer-web, winding up by a supper at the Gaiety after the green rag was down.

There was not much of importance to our story occurred on the otherwise important 1st

of September, but much that was so came to pass on the evening thereof and the following day.

The First came gloriously in, with unclouded sunshine and a gentle genial breeze.

At Thaneshurst there were a billiard-room and smoking-room, but no gun-room. Those who came thither for the grouse- and partridge-shooting had to bring their own arms and ammunition. At breakfast there was a fair gathering of lovers of the trigger, who had been invited by Mr. Brooke (though he never handled a gun himself), including the Master of Badenoch, Major Larkspur, young Craven, and others. And disquisitions that were most mysterious to the ladies ensued 'anent,' as the Scots say, the various specialties and qualities of pointers, retrievers, and setters, and of firearms, the 'pin' breechloader, the merits of the Henry-Martini rifle, central-fire, and all the rest of it, till the very *whirr* of the partridge seemed to rise to the listener's ear.

All had donned generally a good style of

shooting-dress, but Foxley wore an elaborate tweed-suit, with knickerbockers and innumerable pockets. He thought he was perfect, even to his Brighton pebble sleeve-links set in gold, and did not hear Larkspur's comment to Craven :

‘ How that snob is got up, by Jove ! ’ said the major, with his glass in his eye.

The breakfast proceeded merrily and was somewhat protracted, and most of the conversation ran on sporting matters—of preserves where birds were fat and trapping easy for poachers; of sport in different countries, from knocking over partridges in Kent to ptarmigan in Scotland and Norway.

And it was on this day that Tom Seymour for the first time since his mishap made his appearance in the dining-room, but looking pale and thin.

‘ How well you look, Seymour, after it all ! Not a hair of your coat turned, as Pupkins would say,’ exclaimed the hypocritical Foxley, as he shook his victim’s hand, and then seated himself beside his uncle, to whom he always

paid assiduous court—more, indeed, than he was wont to do to Mabel.

‘Tom seems quite another man, Alf,’ said old Mr. Brooke, eyeing his young friend kindly. ‘It is wonderful how fast he has picked up since the day he drove out.’

‘So it would seem, uncle,’ replied Alf, with a slight grimace; while he muttered under his red moustache, ‘Hang it! he and Mabel must have been making strong running together, from all I have heard. However, I’ll bring *her* to book yet, if I can. Never venture, never win!’

How little did he think that the ring with which he saw her toying from time to time during breakfast had so recently been slipped upon her pretty finger by the rival whose influence he hated and feared so much, and at whom, more than once, she smiled covertly and *so* consciously, with a soft fond look in her violet-blue eyes, and a quiver on her sweet sensitive lips! For there was now established between the twain that delicate relation, known to themselves alone—save Milly Allingham—

which both understood so well, and which made them both so supremely happy. How different was her state of mind now from anything she had ever before experienced ; and, oh, how unlike was her 'own dear, dear Tom' to all the other men in the world !

She had said all this to Milly again and again, when both were supposed to be sound asleep in their respective couches at night ; and had expressed quite as often, that she 'had no patience' with that young lady's coquetry and caprice in her relations with Rowland Stanley ; and was always affirming that, whatever 'papa or mamma might assert or say,' she would never, never marry a man she did not love. People never did those kind of things now, except in novels, and seldom even then.

'I am so sorry, Alf, that poor Tom can't go with you to-day,' resumed Mr. Brooke to his amiable nephew.

'Better not. We shall be safer without him.'

'How? Why?'

‘I suppose the amount of his experience in sporting is potting pigeons at the Scrubs, or finches on Barnes Common,’ replied Alf, who found it impossible to resist a sneer. ‘And even if he had read up Colonel Hawker on “Shooting” and Hans Busk on the “Rifle,” he would be a source of peril ; for if his shooting is like his riding—’

‘My friend Tom rides very well, and sits his horse like a gentleman,’ struck in Stanley, who, though seated opposite, heard, amid the buzz of the breakfast-table, the remarks of Foxley.

‘Perhaps so, Captain Stanley ; he may ride along a road very well, but he tumbled off, you see, the moment he attempted to ride as if across country.’

All unconscious of these remarks, and that Foxley perhaps would not have been sorry to put a charge of Number 6 into him, if he had been able to go with the shooting-party, the subject of them was intently listening to every remark, however trivial, that fell from the lips of the girl he loved.

‘Your ball, it seems, is sure to prove a brilliant success,’ said she to the major, who was busy with some grouse-pie.

‘Ya-as,’ he replied, with a drawl; and then, turning to Milly Allingham, he added, most probably by chance, ‘By the way, our friend Val Reynolds is coming to it.’

Milly coloured in spite of herself, and merely bowed to the major. No more passed, but there seemed an inference here, a conjunction of persons or ideas, that irritated Stanley; and still more was he to be so ere the day was over. And now the party prepared to set forth. Sandwiches were stowed away in silver boxes, and pocket-pistols were filled by Mr. Mulbery, though a luncheon was coming, in addition, in the pony-phaeton; and as the sportsmen prepared to set forth, Mrs. Brooke was not ill-pleased to see that the Master of Badenoch was much disposed to linger with Mabel.

Why did not Mrs. Brooke, with all her adoration of the Peerage, ‘go in’ for the cultivation of the Master? it may be asked. The

truth was, that, with all her vanity and selfishness, she would have shrunk from intrusting her only daughter to such a husband ; his character for wildness and recklessness was serious, and his debts were averred to be overwhelming. With her, riches were only the means to an end—yet not the end of her ambition—to see Mabel's name among the Peerage, or even the Baronetage ; to be able to talk of 'my daughter, Lady Mabel ;' but 'mistress of Badenoch,' even had the Master (one day to be a viscount) been a desirable *parti*, she could not understand. It was Scotch perhaps; but anyway it sounded strange to an English ear. Badenoch, like Larkspur, had a handsome fortune in prospect ; yet both made no secret in the regiment of the trouble they had to make both ends meet in an extravagant corps, and how often they were reduced to flying kites and taking up each other's bills.

In other respects young Badenoch was after her own heart. Had he not, like the Lord of Glenroy, 'a family tree on which all

the birds of the air might have roosted,' claiming, though a very matter-of-fact Hussar, a descent from that Lord of Badenoch who was Scottish ambassador at the Court of Louis IX., and the surety of the marriage of his king with Johanna of England ?

But she very little knew that in secret he was a very aristocratic 'snob,' who, while 'polishing off' her good old husband's preserves, skilful enough to kill his five-and-twenty brace of birds per day, and enjoying his hospitality, agreed with Larkspur, that 'Brooke was a rum old file; kept horses though he never rode them, and cellars full of tip-top wine though he drank very little of it. His bunk at Thaneshurst was,' they admitted to each other, 'a deuced improvement upon Brighton Barracks.'

No doubt its stately rooms were so to theirs, with hard-wood or doubtful mahogany tables, stained with the rings of long-since emptied tumblers of grog and champagne-glasses; littered with dog-eared *Army Lists*, and yellow-covered French novels; by torn

bills of the Brighton Theatre, old kids, billets-doux from actresses and sewing girls, unpaid bills, meerschaums, cigar-ashes, and soda-water bottles, and suchlike samples of bachelor life in H.B.M. barracks ; though we have been in many a subaltern's room, furnished with elegance, where such samples were *not* to be seen.

From the terrace, Mr. Brooke, with his old face radiant with pleasure, accompanied by the ladies and Seymour, saw the sportsmen set forth, and proceed laughingly and noisily down the avenue, to where the beaters and keepers awaited them at the corner of a copse ; and Foxley, as his uncle's representative, took charge of the arrangements.

'Badenoch,' said he, 'you will go to the top of the cover on the right. Captain Stanley, will you please go by the left? Major Larkspur and I will keep in the centre till we emerge in the field beyond.'

'Vewy good,' lisped the Master of Badenoch.

'Ah,' said Alf, 'you'll find this something

better than your “Tommiebeg” business in Scotland.’

The other sportsmen were all neighbours, including the Reverend Alban Butterley, and, knowing the ground, required no instruction; and after passing through the belt of trees, the far extent of stubble or grass fields, interspersed here and there by gorse-covered knolls, spread in the sunshine before the sportsmen, the guns began to bang off here and there as the brown coveys rose whirring upward, and the serious business of that great epoch, the First of September, began in earnest, in a way that would have astonished our forefathers; for does not Smollett tell us in *Sir Lancelot Greaves*, as a momentous circumstance, that one of his characters was so deadly a shot that he could shoot dead a crow upon the wing!

As it was less to enjoy the sport than to cast himself once more into the society of Milly Allingham that Rowland Stanley had come to Thaneshurst, to chronicle all the various feats of the party and the number of birds each ‘knocked over’ is no part of our plan.

Stanley was a fair average sportsman, and more than once had potted his tiger from a howdah, and even from the branch of a tree, in India. He was one of the best shots of the party, and frequently elicited the praise of the keepers, by the mode in which he selected his birds, and the clever manner in which he killed them; but his mind was wandering away from the partridges; the excitement of the sport, the spirit of emulation, the desire to excel in the work of slaughter, to parade before the ladies the biggest bag of the party, the sylvan beauty of the scenery, and the clear brilliance of the day—all failed to exhilarate him.

Milly's bearing perplexed, and the trivial remark made by Larkspur, about the ball of the morrow night, irritated him. Had her name been coupled with that of Reynolds amid the mess-room gossip and banter of the Hussars? It almost seemed so; and when luncheon was brought by Mulbery in the pony-phaeton, and the shooting-party gathered to refresh their 'inner man,' and lay grouped on the grass by twos or threes, between the in-

tervals of discussing chicken and ham, raised Yorkshire pies, bitter beer, hock, dry sherry, and champagne, he had to endure some such remarks as these, made not always in low tones:

‘Yes,’ said Lieutenant Craven, assenting to a remark of Larkspur, ‘I agree with you that Miss Allingham is a girl of unexceptionally good style, but rather coquettish and all that sort of thing, don’t you know.’

‘I don’t say she is a regular flirt,’ replied the major, while leisurely rolling up a cigarette; ‘but there is no doubt, I believe, that she *did* make uncommon strong running with Val Reynolds of the Guards.’

‘Reynolds again!’ thought Stanley, with a silent adjective hovering on his lips.

‘He is the heir to a title, you know,’ said Craven; ‘and, being so, I cannot understand why the little Brooke girl didn’t try to have her innings in that quarter.’

‘Perhaps she didn’t want to rival her friend; besides, one may see with half an eye that she is devilish spoony on that city fellow Seymour, don’t you know?’

‘And I’ll go bail,’ said an Irish captain, striking in, ‘that the mammas of both studied Burke and Debrett well before they came out in London—pass the sherry, Craven—and as far as Reynolds and she are concerned, the little birds say—’

These slipshod remarks were gall and wormwood to Stanley, and yet he feared that Milly Allingham had laid herself open to them, so he turned off, without waiting to listen to the gossip of ‘the little birds.’

Noon was long since past now, and it was proposed to work their way back again, through the fields, towards the belt of coppice, in which, or about the gorse near which, many of the coveys were supposed to have taken shelter; and as the party neared Thaneshurst Stanley was thankful that the great epoch, the First of September, was over at last.

To have left *before* that day, when he had come ostensibly and apparently expressly for the shooting, would have been impossible without exciting comment or suspicion that something was wrong. Indeed it would have

been offensive to Mr. Brooke. But now Thaneshurst was intolerable to him; so truly it is, that some men in loving a woman must have all her heart or none.

Ideas of rejoining the regiment again occurred to him; and, at all events, as he had no intention of returning for the short remainder of his leave of absence to empty London, as the first movement in his new plans, he telegraphed to Tattersall that very night to sell a pair of nags he had left with him; and he would leave Thaneshurst on the morrow—but for where, he scarcely knew. Anyhow, the offhand remarks of the Hussars had called to memory all his past suspicion and raised his pique, his pride, and jealousy to fever-heat. Many other guests were coming to Thaneshurst, and no doubt, when once he was gone, she would soon forget that such a fond fool as himself existed.

Yet, when the morrow came, so unstable was he of purpose, that he changed his plans once again—unstable, at least, so far as Milly was concerned.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNSTABLE.

ON the evening of the First a tolerably large party were assembled in the drawing-room, and in Mrs. Brooke's boudoir, a charming little bijou apartment, which opened off it. The past day's sport, the prospects for to-morrow, and the coming ball, formed ample subjects for discussion, and Stanley felt that the game of cross purposes between him and Milly Allingham was becoming more and more entangled.

She had a grudge against him, that was all the stronger because it was utterly unreasonable. 'He asked me once to love him, and I certainly trifled with him,' thought she; 'but why, when he has so many opportunities here, does he not ask me *again*? Perhaps I would not trifle with him now.'

But this, in her pride of heart, she would

neither communicate nor admit, even to her friend and gossip Mabel Brooke; and because Stanley's regard seemed to have cooled down into mere friendship since he came to Thanes-hurst, on this evening she revenged herself by flirting and coquetting with the somewhat ponderous Badenoch, till Stanley was, to use a common phrase, 'wild'; but in all her doings Milly had much of what a writer calls 'that *aplomb* which is part of the armour of a woman of the world.'

Badenoch had a head of carefully-parted hair, was handsome, but not overgifted with brains, and as the only son of a wealthy viscount was not supposed to require them much; yet to Araminta, Fanny Conyers's younger sister, he seemed quite a hero—'an Agamemnon,' as she said, without having the least idea of what the king of Mycenæ was, but thought she had seen him at Madame Tussaud's in Baker Street; and she quite envied Milly when she saw the two sitting somewhat apart from all the rest in Mrs. Brooke's tiny boudoir, which was charmingly furnished with blue

silk and maple-wood, tables and consoles covered with expensive and grotesque china, *jardinières* of sweet-smelling plants, with jets springing amid them, and basins with gold-fish darting about, with baskets hung in the windows; and in one corner a beautiful little whatnot littered with crested note-paper; in another a cottage-piano, over which hung a water-colour of Thaneshurst, done by Mabel.

Here then, when Stanley handed Fanny Conyers to the piano, and turned the leaves for her while she coyly sung her inevitable

‘He thinks I do not love him,’

he found Milly and the Hussar laughingly discussing love and matrimony, and the latter regarding her with a somewhat puzzled expression as she concluded something she was saying, by adding,

‘You know Dean Swift says, humorously, that “married people, for being so closely united, are but the apter to cease loving; as knots the harder they are pulled break the sooner.”’ And then, thinking perhaps she had gone quite far enough, or not wishing to

leave the pair at the piano entirely to themselves, she crossed the room and joined them.

Stanley looked on her with something of sadness, as he thought that after to-morrow night he should see her no more, as he had resolved to leave England—most certainly Sussex ; he would brook the torture and suspense to which she subjected him no more. And even now, when gazing on her wonderful beauty, as she bent over Fanny, it seemed to him strange and sorrowful that a time must come when it must fade and she would grow old, that it should utterly pass away. But are we not told in ancient story, that the most difficult office imposed upon Psyche was to descend to the lower regions, and bring thence some portion of Proserpine's beauty in a box ; and that when, impelled by curiosity, she raised the lid, there came forth but a vapour, which was all that remained of her wonderful loveliness ?

The two happiest persons there, though they barely interchanged twenty words, were Tom Seymour and Mabel Brooke. In the

earlier days of her girlhood many men, then as now, came about Thaneshurst and the house in Park Lane ; yet she never wondered, like other girls, who would propose, or if they did whom she would marry.

It was Tom Seymour—always Tom—who had filled the girl's heart. They scarcely spoke, but their eyes were eloquent enough, as the watchful Foxley detected. Though without an iota of genuine love for his cousin, and with what heart or soul he did possess full of his fair friend Aimée, Alf Foxley looked very darkly on the secret intelligence that too evidently subsisted between his cousin and 'that cad Seymour,' especially when he recalled the blunt cold brevity of her refusal of his—to say the least of it—very matter-of-fact proposal. Yet he resolved to try his fortune with her once again, perhaps when returning together from the Hussar ball ; but she never gave him the wished-for opportunity.

'One is necessarily cautious of using strong terms in these days of persistent repression of

all emotions,' says a writer. By the same rule we have frequently to model our features to suit the occasion; but in this art Foxley did not much excel when roused. He had imbibed a good deal of wine at dinner, and now there was an evil glare in his eyes and an inflation of his nostrils with rage, as he leaned against the velvet-fringed mantelpiece; his teeth were set, his hands involuntarily clenched, and he would have struck Seymour before Mabel's face but for the utter outrageousness of such a proceeding.

‘What is this Tom Seymour tells me, Captain Stanley,’ said Mr. Brooke, suddenly approaching the trio at the piano, ‘that you are going to leave us after the Hussar ball?’

‘I fear that I must, Mr. Brooke,’ replied Stanley, while Milly looked at him with a startled expression in her dark eyes, an expression which, with all her tact, she failed to conceal from him.

‘After one day’s shooting!’ exclaimed Mr. Brooke.

‘I shall then have had two,’ replied Stanley, smiling.

‘My dear sir, the thing is not to be thought of.’

‘I must indeed, with a thousand thanks to you, Mr. Brooke, think of decamping so soon, as I leave England at an early period.’

‘I am so sorry to hear this. My dear Milly, could *you* not prevail on our friend to change his mind?’

A little flush shot over her face, as she said,

‘I fear Captain Stanley is too thoroughly a roving Englishman, who is no sooner in any place than he begins to scheme how best to get away from it, and never knows where his happiness really lies; so I fear, Mr. Brooke, my poor attempts at persuasion would prove fruitless.’

And with a sweet smile, while bowing and fanning herself, she passed out of the boudoir, and took a seat in the other room, beside the handsome curate, Alban Butterley.

In her reply, her glance, and manner there

was something that exercised the mind of Stanley. That she had started with a palpable dilation of the eye, and hence displayed some emotion, however slight, when Mr. Brooke announced his speedy departure, was evident; that a flush had crossed her cheek when asked to persuade him to stay was evident also, but that might arise from annoyance. There was something of a taunt in terming him a 'roving Englishman,' who knew not where his own happiness lay.

In all this there was much that, considering their past and that scene in Connaught Terrace, might invite and lead to an explanation; but on that night Stanley did not seek it, and certainly she gave him no opportunity of doing it, as she always contrived to have a tolerable group of men about her chair.

He knew not what to think of it; but after reflecting on the past, and what he had heard from the Hussars incidentally, though it might all be mere mess-room gossip, he felt unalterably fixed to leave Thaneshurst.

Never again would he speak to her on the subject of love ; never again, when his soul seemed to tremble on his lips, utter to her such words as he had once done, to be treated with mockery. But poor Rowland Stanley could little foresee all the morrow was to bring forth.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WHITE CAMELLIA.

WE have said that Stanley changed his mind once again, and it came about in this fashion.

The 2nd of September proved a day of incessant rain, falling steadily and perpendicularly in bucketfuls; even the most enthusiastic sportsman would not have gone abroad; the white mist rolled up from the hollow coombs and shrouded the green downs, and the stone gutters of the terrace at Thanes-hurst were gorged with water. The gentlemen betook them to cigars, billiards, loading cartridges, dozing over *Punch* and the *Graphic*, going over the stables, and so forth; while the ladies amused themselves as best they might, in the final arrangement of their ball-dresses, the selection of suites of jewels, and happy anticipations of the coming festivity.

So determined was Stanley to leave soon

that he spent part of the forenoon in packing his portmanteaux, that he might start, almost at a moment's notice, after the Hussar ball ; and feeling somewhat more at ease, now that his mind was sternly and resolutely made up, he rambled into the spacious conservatory that he might enjoy a cigar, and the luxury of thinking without interruption ; but there, as the Fates would have it, he came suddenly upon Milly Allingham, seated, in a lounging attitude, upon a little marchioness, so immersed in a book that she did not hear him approach, and he was able for a few seconds to study the exquisite grace of her pose, the contour of her head, neck, and shoulders. She was evidently absorbed in what she was reading, for Milly, we have said elsewhere, was an intellectual and well-read girl.

At last she became conscious of who was near her, and closed her book with a smile and a bow.

‘ I fear I have disturbed you—so sorry,’ said Stanley ; ‘ but I came here to smoke and think alone, after—after—’

‘Not knowing what to do with yourself all forenoon.’

‘Nay, Miss Allingham, I have been busy getting my things packed, prior to my departure.’

‘And,’ said she, after a little pause, ‘and is it really true that yesterday you telegraphed to Tattersall about your horses?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then you don’t return to London?’

‘Not for many years, probably.’

There was again a startled, earnest, and searching expression for a second, but a second only, in the upturned eyes of Milly, and then she said, smiling,

‘I wish you a pleasant journey.’

‘Say *voyage*, rather, Miss Allingham, as I join my regiment by sea. But what book is this you are so intent upon?’

‘It is a work by Moreri, a very scarce one, which I found in the library, containing an essay on the passion of love; and he seems to think that love and hate may exist in the same breast for the same person at once.

Do you believe in such a paradox, Captain Stanley ?

‘I do,’ said he, and then became silent ; for, in the peculiar relation in which they stood with regard to each other, to discuss this subject was indeed to approach perilous ground, to enter a battery fully mined. Milly evidently felt this, for she avoided his eye ; and then, by a pretty blunder, as if to court the very scene that might ensue, she opened the volume, and said,

‘The writer here tells us, Captain Stanley, that there is none of all the passions that has employed the thoughts of moralists and philosophers, and perhaps of almost every other species of writers, as that of love ; but whether this is an argument of its excellence, he is unable to determine.’

‘The best incentive to love is merit,’ said Stanley, as he stood irresolutely twirling his moustache, thinking how lovely she was, and that he had perhaps been premature in his packing, ‘but I remember to have read that M. St.-Evremond says that true love re-

sembled ghosts and apparitions, because every one talked of it, but few or none had ever *seen* it.'

Their eyes met for an instant, with a glance there was no mistaking. A rich colour came into Milly's cheek, and a light shone in her dark eye ; the colour passed away ; she became paler than ever ; but the joyous light remained ; and she said in her heart, with coquettish triumph, 'He loves me, he loves me still.' Then turning, a little nervously, once more to her book, she said hurriedly, 'There is a terrible story here of the power of love, which I shall tell to you in English.'

'Do, please,' said he, leaning over her, so close that his moustache almost touched the coil of her back hair.

'It is an old, old story, of the 16th century. He tells us that Julietta de Gonzaga, a lady descended from one of the most noble of Italian families, was so celebrated for her beauty that the fame of it reached even to Constantinople ; and induced Cherreddin Barbarossa, Admiral of Soliman II., and Viceroy

of Algiers, to attempt to carry her off, as a present for his master, but failed. For some time—so vain and coquettish was she—she declined the offers of many royal princes. At last she became the bride of Vincent, the Duke of Mantua, who, in time, grew tired of her, and forsook her. Her love now turned to hatred, and she became almost mad with the desire for revenge; and, confident in the wonderful power of her beauty and attraction of manner, by the assistance of his confessor, she contrived, after a time, to have an interview with the recreant duke, whose race ended with Charles IV., during the war of the Spanish succession. She had left nothing undone or unstudied by which to dazzle and allure him; and though vengeance rankled in her heart, she reproached him so sweetly and so touchingly for his falsehood to her, that the Duke of Mantua felt all his love return in greater force than ever; and he told her, with the utmost tenderness, that he loved her still, and her only. She affected to doubt this, and to disbelieve all that he might urge, till she re-

quired of him, as the most terrible proof of his love, a solemn *denial of God*, which he had no sooner done, than she planted a dagger in his heart. She then stabbed herself, and died above his body, in a room of the Gonzaga palace at Mantua—still pointed out to the curious.'

‘People do not go such terrible lengths nowadays, Miss Allingham; yet love may change, or even turn to positive dislike, under certain influences.’

‘The author of *Destiny* asks, “Whence is it that two persons, who seem to have been born only to hate each other, should, under any circumstances, actually love each other?”’

Love and hate—his own idea again.

‘I do not know; I am no casuist, Miss Allingham,’ said he, endeavouring, for a time, to conceal alike the tenderness of his voice and eyes; ‘but we seem to have suddenly become involved in a rather curious discussion—on the subject of love—a subject which you treated very lightly, and dismissed very summarily, when I had last the—shall I call

it pleasure?—of speaking to you on the matter.'

She did not see his face, and the measured nature of his words piqued her.

'Ah, you refer to London,' said she, relinquishing her book for the fan that hung at her girdle, and which she proceeded nervously to open and shut. 'The truth is, Captain Stanley, we were too much together, or rather, I should say, seen too much together, at musical *fêtes* in the Botanical Gardens, the Albert Hall, the opera, and ever so many dances.'

'Do not say so,' he urged; but Milly felt the necessity of defending herself when she was not sued, and that necessity roused her pride. 'I would all those past joys were to be done again; and yet—'

'Perhaps, better not.'

'Yes, perhaps,' said he; 'but why?'

'People said—I scarcely know how to tell you what they did say—' she resumed, and then paused, with a coy smile on her down-cast face, while she toyed with a beautiful

white camellia, which *she* had selected from the many around her, to wear at the ball.

‘Pray tell me.’

‘Well, from being seen so much together, that—that we were engaged; and *that* was such nonsense, you know, Captain Stanley.’

‘Would it had not been so?’ thought he in his heart, but was silent. Was this singular admission a lure of the coquette, or a *flout*? He feared it was the latter, rather than the former.

He sighed, and said, while standing erect and ceasing to lean over her:

‘Miss Allingham, you are to me a species of sphinx, and I am no Oedipus; but only a very plain and matter-of-fact fellow.’

‘You mean that I am an enigma?’

‘Yes; you have treated me very ill; but I shall trouble you no more, as I did when last in London.’

‘I am not a girl to break my heart for the loss of any man,’ said *she*, fanning herself vigorously, and still resolved to stand on the defensive; ‘but I do think that after all the

admiration you expressed for me, you have put a slight upon me for Fanny Conyers.'

'Miss Conyers!'

'Yes, Captain Stanley.'

'How could I put a slight upon you?' he urged softly; 'did you not laughingly, mockingly treat my earnest declaration to you in London; and since then, how have you behaved to me?' he asked, almost in anger, as many little episodes came to memory; and she, though intensely gratified by the turn the conversation was taking, beat the floor with a little foot, too piqued by the trifling attention shown to another to surrender even now.

'Listen to me, Miss Allingham, Milly,' said Stanley, placing a hand gently on her shoulder, while all his great love for her gushed up in his heart, which forgave her all her coquetry: 'That I love you dearly you know well; that in you life centres; that my whole soul is bound up in you. Must all this be said in vain? Have you no answer for me?'

Of all the many who had admired or

dangled about her, none had ever spoken thus ; yet she was still silent. Either the moment of triumph and victory, so long in coming again, or joy at the avowal of his love —both perhaps—deprived her for a time of the power of speech ; and her soft lids drooped under the passionate earnestness of his handsome dark eyes ; while, misinterpreting her silence, he spoke again, in a voice that was tremulous :

‘O Milly, think well. I speak on this subject for the last time. “The marriage ring,” says one of the sweetest of our writers, “is not a toy of triumph to be passed from one hand to another. It is the emblem of soul for soul, and heart for heart, for ever, or it is nothing.” I ask you, Milly, darling, will you be my wife?’

His great tenderness did indeed move her ; but ere she could reply, in his impetuosity he spoke again, with something emphatic in his tone, while fearing that her silence or delay arose from the knowledge that Reynolds was to be at the Hussar ball.

‘My time is short in England now, and if I am ever to be more than a dangling admirer, one too treated somewhat like a fool, I must have some sign of hope in the future from you, or this night we part for ever. Do, darling, learn to know your own mind ere it is too late. You are agitated. Do not answer me now, unless in the affirmative; but if I am to hope that you have accepted me, wear this white camellia at the ball to-night in your corsage, and bestow it on me, as on him you acknowledge to love best in the world.’

Smiling and blushing, with moistened eyes, she gave him a quick glance, that seemed to him one of unutterable tenderness, and placing the camellia in her bosom hurried away; for footsteps were now heard in the conservatory.

There was more of romance, a wholly unthought-of element, in Milly’s nature than she would have acknowledged to any one; and she liked this new idea of the camellia very much; while Stanley, though his lips had never touched even her hand, felt so certain

of her love, from the brilliance of her parting smile, that his heart expanded with pure happiness, and he seemed to tread on air, and felt very much disposed in general to bless the chance that had led him into the conservatory, and Moreri's work in particular, for all that his story 'anent' love had led to.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HUSSAR BALL.

STANLEY did not see Milly after she left him. He was to dine that evening at the Hussar mess, and afterwards join the Thaneshurst party at the ball, which was to be given in the famous Pavilion ; and when reverting to the idea of the camellia she was to wear—it might be *not* wear—there were times when he thought he was rash to leave the matter thus with her ; but that in the conservatory he should have pressed her for a final answer. Then, anon, he deemed it better as it was.

Never had Stanley enjoyed less a dinner-party or night at mess than this—yet the dinner was, of course, perfection, from the clear soup and sherry to the coffee and maraschino—his mind was so preoccupied. Larkspur and some others, who were on the ball committee, had been lunching and ‘refresh-

ing' themselves all day, and they canvassed their fair guests in a somewhat free-and-easy manner ; and the major, whose utterance was a little 'feathery,' more than once spoke of Milly Allingham in a jaunty fashion, that roused Stanley's anger highly. He was the more irritated that, owing to some blunder of Larkspur, the vehicle he had ordered was very late in reaching the barracks ; and Stanley could little foresee *all* that this delay was subsequently to cost him.

'Here it is at last,' said he, as a mess-waiter announced it, with others. 'Eleven o'clock ! By Jove, Larkspur, we shall be very late ; you especially, as one of the hosts.'

He flung himself into the vehicle, and with three of the Hussars drove off to the Pavilion. Never before had Stanley felt such emotion, excitement, joy, and hope about a mere ball, and never did he see so little of a ball as of this one eventually. Never did that expensive foible of H.R.H. George, Prince Regent, look more gay than on this occasion. The rain had passed away, the sky was blue and

starry, and against it the cupolas, the bulbous-shaped dome of the central façade, and the smaller domes at the wings stood up sharply and darkly defined. From the windows flakes of brilliant light fell on the trees and shrubbery without, and gay figures were seen flitting to and fro. Within and without the edifice seemed instinct with life and sound. Vehicles, many of them stately equipages, were streaming along the garden front, depositing those invited to the ball, and passing out at the opposite entrance, and the crash of military music announced that the ball had begun, and some way made through the programme.

Rowland Stanley had been at too many regimental and garrison balls to be much impressed by the military display made by the Hussars on this occasion ; yet, all-preoccupied as he was with thoughts of Milly Allingham, he could not help being struck by the singular aspect of the famous Pavilion and of the rooms set apart for dancing, refreshments, and promenading.

In the vestibule adjoining the western portico there was of course a guard of honour of Hussars on foot, with sword and carbine; sergeants even posted at all the doors as guides; there were fountains of perfumed water, bouquets *ad libitum*, and the sub-lieutenants were in attendance with packs of engagement-cards for the guests, all duly stamped with the Prince of Wales's feathers (the regimental crest).

The magnificent music-room in the northern wing, with its walls covered with crimson and gold and representations of scenery said to be taken from the neighbourhood of Pekin, was set apart for dancing. And here, of course, were trophies of arms, amid which the guidons and kettle-drums of the regiment occupied a conspicuous place; and from under the great dome, the swell of which is covered with scale work in what is termed 'green gold,' eight great lustres shed a flood of light upon the dancers.

Already the room was crowded, yet more guests were pouring in; the number of uni-

forms, the exquisite toilettes, and the great beauty of most of the ladies, made up a scene, in such a place, of wonderful gaiety and brilliance. Officers of all corps were there; guardsmen from town, artillery from Woolwich, linesmen from Chatham, Aldershot, 'the Alma Mater of the British *militaire*,' and a fair sprinkling of naval men too.

The third quadrille was over as Stanley—who came of course in full uniform—learned from his card, and the Hussar band struck up a waltz by Strauss—*Die Fledermans*—and amid the whirl of dancers, gyrating like a human zoetrope, he saw Milly flying past with the arm of Val Reynolds round her. She was dressed entirely in white; a costume so becoming to women whose hair, eyes, and eyelashes are dark.

In his anxiety to see whether the camellia was in her bosom, he scarcely heeded the circumstance of her dancing with Reynolds.

'How late you are, Stanley,' said Foxley, who was not much of a dancer, and was lounging against Westmacott's famous chim-

ney-piece, with a leering smile in his shifty eyes, that had a trick of avoiding the glance of others, while affecting that which sat very ill upon him—aristocratic apathy; ‘all the cards must be filled up by this time.’

‘Miss Allingham promised to keep several dances for me.’

‘Time you saw about them, old fellow; for she has been going the pace with Reynolds ever since he came into the room, at least so far as the round dances are concerned.’

Heedless of this, Stanley made his way through the maze of the room to where they were pausing for a moment, she flushed, breathless, and palpitating, on the strong arm of Reynolds, who was in his Guards uniform, and whispering away to her with great *empressement*, she the while fanning herself, and looking—as Stanley thought—most radiantly beautiful; but ere he could address her they were off again, ‘with flying feet,’ she waltzing with a wondrous grace and singularly effortless ease; and as they passed him, he heard Reynolds say laughingly,

‘Oh, yes, there are loves and loves, just as there are kisses and kisses.’

Stanley could distinctly perceive that she had *not* the white camellia in the front of her corsage, nor in her glorious dark hair, nor anywhere about her dress. He was not accepted by her, but rejected, and she was whirling in the dance without it. Had she lost it? for she could not have forgotten the flower.

Another moment and he saw it! *Where?*

In Reynolds’s button-hole! How dared she mock him thus? was his first thought. This was some portion of what ‘the little birds’ have had to talk about. He remembered—ay, savagely remembered—that less important affair of the little bouquet, on the night—or morning rather—of the Brooke’s ball in Park Lane. It was but a trifle; yet it and other ‘trifles, light as air,’ now made a tremendous storm in the breast of Rowland Stanley, and he drew back towards the door amid a group of officers who were lingering there.

Milly and her partner paused again, and her eyes certainly swept the room, as if in search of some one. Suddenly they fell on Stanley, and seemed to sparkle anew with pleasure, as she made a wave with her fan towards him; but he simply bowed, and turned away. There was a haggard expression of sorrow and reproach in his handsome eyes, that was fated to haunt her for long, long after, when it was all too late to repair the mischief done.

The flower, the gift which she was to bestow, as an emblem to him whom she loved best in the world, was now openly bestowed on another. He retired from the room. His sense of mortification, disappointment, wounded self-esteem, and rage at being so befooled was intense. The last element enabled him, perhaps, to support the others better. She had purposed and prepared, with coquettish malice aforethought, this *coup*, to show how little she cared for him, for his passion, or the avowal of it. Had any lover ever been so cruelly and deliberately insulted before?

A deadly sickness of the heart mingled with his anger; and from the past he turned away with unavailing regret. Rude though it might be, he would return to Thaneshurst no more. He should never have gone there at all. ‘Ass, dolt, idiot!’ were the smallest epithets he applied to himself. Thaneshurst! he would loathe the recollection of it. Brighton, too, was hateful to him; for there his life had been blighted and his love ridiculed; but in a few hours the early train and he should have left it far behind.

He would leave England, and never again look upon the fair false girl who had so befooled him.

Like one who was stunned or in a dream, and with the distant music of the band still ringing in his ears, he made his way into the yellow drawing-room, which had been set apart for refreshments; and then, draining a great goblet of iced champagne, began to consider his movements anew: not that his mind in the least wavered from his fixed plan to leave Brighton without delay, with a brief

note to Mr. Brooke, though the old gentleman was at the ball (which he deemed a dreadful bore, but endured for Mabel's sake). And Mrs. Brooke, too, among the other matrons and chaperones of the county, was in all her glory ; and so many men of rank, and even better position than Badenoch, were present, and had inscribed their names on Mabel's engagement-card, that, for the nonce, her maternal brain was somewhat distracted. 'How loud the old party looks in her purple moiré !' was the ungallant remark of the Master of Badenoch to some of his friends.

In his fury and anger the unfortunate Stanley felt disposed for more iced champagne than he usually imbibed ; and while having it, and waiting till a vehicle was procured for him, he was compelled to listen to some of the remarks of those about—remarks which rather added fuel to the flame of his anger.

'What, not dancing—*you*, Stanley?' said one of the Hussars.

'Ah, why have you left the room already?' added Larkspur, who came forward with Foxley.

‘For the same reason, perhaps, that you have done so, major,’ replied Stanley.

‘Thirsty, deuced thirsty; and I can’t get one turn with *la belle* Allingham.’

‘Why, major?’

‘Her card is filled up already, she says; yet I could have sworn I saw vacant places on it. But no one ever has a chance with her, don’t you know, when Reynolds is near.’

Larkspur twisted his moustache angrily, and drained another goblet of champagne, of which he had already taken more than enough.

‘I’ll cut out Val yet; propose to the girl, and all that sort of thing,’ resumed Larkspur, whose utterance was becoming thick; ‘but I must think and smoke over it first. No, no, Larkspur, my boy; you can’t afford to chuck yourself away. What do you say, Foxley—do you think if I asked her to be Mrs. Larkspur, she would say no?’

But the other did not condescend to reply. He was sulky. Tom Seymour was not there, at all events; and he could neither dance

with, nor dangle about, Mabel. But Alf was little or no dancer ; and she was absorbed by others. He felt that he could, more than ever, be easily dispensed with ; hence he became more moody as the night wore on. Mabel he looked upon as his own special property ; 'and no end of other fellows' had swept her away.

At last Stanley quitted the yellow drawing-room. Foxley thought he had returned to the dancers ; but he had quitted the Pavilion, and driven away. Thus, when Reynolds came, a few minutes after, in search of him, he was nowhere to be found.

Had he chosen to remain and show indifference—that emotion so difficult to feign when one feels but love—he would have found no difficulty in procuring any number of brilliant partners. He was always sure of good introductions ; and moreover, Stanley, if a little less fashionable-looking than Reynolds, had more the bearing of a soldier and a man—he carried his head so well ; and his hands, though white and square, were well formed and muscular. Moreover, he had



upon his breast the V.C., for an act of valour in the expedition to Bhotan ; whereas all Reynolds's campaigns had been in the vicinity of Windsor or Wormwood Scrubs and the Long Valley.

And now to explain the mystery of the white camellia, and how Milly Allingham was not, in reality, the heartless coquette she appeared to be. How little could Stanley have supposed that, at the very moment he gave her that almost stern glance of sorrow and reproach which so greatly perplexed and bewildered her, Milly, on looking down, suddenly missed the camellia from the front of her dress !

In dancing, it had fallen from her bosom unseen ; but Reynolds had adroitly picked it up, and placed it, all unknown to her—as she was perpetually looking about for Stanley, and had, as Larkspur asserted, many vacant places on her card reserved for him—in a buttonhole of his coat.

‘ My camellia ! ’ she exclaimed, as the flush incidental to the waltz passed away, and she

became very pale indeed. ‘Oh, please restore it to me, Captain Reynolds !’

‘It should have been a scarlet one for a white dress, Miss Allingham,’ said he ; ‘but do permit me to retain it, in memory of to-night, and of the belle of the Hussar ball.’

‘No, no ; do please give it me,’ said she, so impetuously, as she held forth a tremulous hand, that Reynolds gave her back the camellia. But as, with quick and impatient fingers, she was endeavouring to replace it in the corsage of her dress, it dropped to pieces ; and the white petals of the fatal flower fell on the well-waxed floor.

Alarmed by all this, for she had really meant to do all that Stanley wished her, she now complained of being weary, and requested to be led to the side of her chaperone, Mrs. Brooke. She then asked Reynolds to look for Rowland Stanley. The tall Guardsman good-naturedly obeyed her ; but soon returned to say that he had left the Pavilion, none knew how or why.

Well did Milly know *why*. Her heart was

wrung with genuine sorrow, perplexity, and alarm, for she really loved Stanley now, with all the passion of which she was capable. To-morrow, on the first moment she could find available, or when he asked for an explanation—if his pride and love would permit him—she should explain the whole affair. To this she felt Stanley was every way entitled. But a sense of dread hung over her; and though she danced every dance that was in the programme, she did so mechanically, and without the least sense of enjoyment. She had an emotion of oppression, rather, and heard with intense annoyance the wonder Mrs. Brooke expressed, from time to time, at the absence of Captain Stanley, whom all supposed to have been taken seriously unwell. Too true it is that many an unseen, unspoken, unwritten romance, many a moment of mortification and misery or of triumph and joy, may be acted amid such scenes of gaiety as that ball, which Milly and Stanley were fated long to remember.

At last the rooms began to empty, and the

successive rolling of carriage-wheels under the domed entrance that leads to Castle Square announced the departure of guests.

‘How tired I am of all this, Milly, and of these heavy dandies, and of their got-by-rote gallant speeches, with awful pauses between !’ said Mabel, as their party passed outward by the vestibule ; ‘and how often I have wished that Tom were here with us !’ she added in a lower voice.

Both girls had long been weary and anxious to go ; but not so ‘Mamma Brooke, Madame le Nouveau Riche,’ as Larkspur was in the habit of impertinently calling her at mess. She had been thoroughly enjoying herself. She had not the—to her—incubus of Tom Seymour’s presence to compete with those who filled Mabel’s card with their names, and claimed her hand for every waltz ; men, like Larkspur, who had ‘won their spurs,’ and others, like Reynolds and young Badenoch, who had upon their macassared heads the reflected glory of as many generations as any one else of course, but bearing rank and title.

At length they, the Thaneshurst party, were all in their carriages, and bowling homeward by the Lewes road, in the darkness of the early morning; and Milly, reclining, shawled, in a corner, was very silent; while ever and anon she repeated to herself, 'in a very few hours now he shall know all.'

But as they drove down the avenue to Thaneshurst, she remarked, with something of foreboding, that the room occupied usually by Stanley was involved in darkness.

Mr. Mulbery rang the breakfast-bell somewhat later than usual on the morning after the ball, and all the party assembled, save Stanley. Unwearied by the late hours, the heat, and the exertion of such continued dancing, the four girls looked unusually fresh, bright, and animated; and the ball was being discussed in all its phases and features, with countless bits of airy gossip, recollections of tender and gallant tomfooleries, of hand-pressing and shawling; while Mr. Brooke, who was sick of the subject, and Tom were anxious

to have a look at the morning papers, which the butler had duly cut and aired for them.

On this morning Milly wore a robe of pink cachmere and quilted satin. Her pale loveliness was now all the paler, in consequence of her own thoughts; but the colour became her so well. Could Stanley but have seen her then!

Ever and anon surprise was expressed at his sudden disappearance from the dancing-room. Fanny Conyers felt somewhat indignant with him, as in his preoccupation of thought he had passed her twice unnoticed in the ball-room; but Fanny, so *petite* and *spirituelle*—‘Dimples,’ as they named her—nathless her too apparent fancy for the absent one, had ‘danced and flirted,’ as Foxley said, ‘with some three or four fellows to any extent and with great *espièglerie*,’ yet she felt piqued, for Stanley had never once asked for a sight of her engagement-card.

‘Letter for you, sir,’ said Mulbery, presenting one to Mr. Brooke upon a salver; ‘just come by the morning post, sir.’

The old gentleman adjusted his gold spectacles on his nose, and on opening the missive, exclaimed :

‘God bless me, how singular! Why, Martha dear, we have lost Captain Stanley!’

‘Lost him, John?’ said the old lady, pausing over her coffee, while her daughter and Milly exchanged quick glances of intelligence, for the two friends were quite in each other’s confidence.

‘He is off to join his regiment in the West Indies—some sudden order, I suppose; and a man seems to have come from Brighton for his luggage last night. He says some rows are expected among the Maroons. He sails from Southampton in the Queen of Britain. “Pray excuse me,” he adds; “and with best wishes to all your family circle, believe me,” &c. The Maroons! who or what are they?’

‘They are some kind of savages in Jamaica, the descendants of the Spaniards and negroes,’ said Miss Araminta Conyers, who was fresh from school.

‘The Queen of Britain!’ said Milly Alling-

ham almost mechanically to herself; 'I thought his regiment was in Bermuda.'

'This departure seems surely very unceremonious, Martha dear,' said Mr. Brooke.

'Ah, but young men are not what **they** were in my days, John.'

Mr. Brooke smiled brightly at the implied compliment to himself; but it was soon pretty apparent to all that Milly Allingham was sorely *distraite*, and her eyes wore a sad, dreamy, and pensive expression she would not have been inclined to admit.

Yet this was often their state when their long and beautiful dark lashes were cast down, though when animated their concentrated expressional power was very great, for hers were eyes which, as some one says, 'would either see too much or tell too much, unless they were under some remarkable control.'

The ball was over; it had ended thus untowardly for him and for her; and this had been the 'midsummer-night's dream' to which both had looked forward the preceding day,

after that sunset confabulation in the conservatory.

How suddenly, after all the brilliance of last night, a pall, a cloud-curtain, had fallen between them, 'it might be for years, it might be for ever'! Too probably the last.

'I had too much champagne, no doubt of it,' whispered Alf to Seymour; 'but for all that I can't help thinking that your friend caved in somehow, and left the Household Brigade in full possession of the field. Perhaps it was a case of "how happy could I be with either," and all that sort of thing.'

It was not often that 'cousin Alf' was in the habit of whispering to Tom (but he found the impossibility of repressing a sneer), and the latter eyed him in rather grim silence, but vouchsafed no reply, and merely thought 'how seedy' his rival looked after last night at the Pavilion.

Breakfast over, Milly complained of feeling ill; there must certainly be thunder in the air; so she retired to her room, accompanied by the gentle and sympathetic Mabel, who

loved her so; 'and,' says Lockhart truly, 'what a goodly thing is a beautiful girl's love for another girl!'

'He has gone, Mab darling,' said she, sobbing, with her face on her friend's shoulder, —'gone with the conviction that he has been tricked and fooled by a hollow-hearted creature, and you know that I am not so. He can never be undeceived now. And, O Mab, I had ever so many vacant places on my card kept specially for him, that we might have some nice long dances together; and so I had to tell fibs to ever so many tiresome men!'

Oh, could she but hear his voice once again, and feel the touch of his hand, or see his gaze bent lovingly, eagerly, and tenderly on her, how different now would be her tone and bearing from what they had been in the silly evil past time!

The man with whose love she had trifled, while it was actually shedding a nameless charm over her existence, and whose presence had given a rosy colouring to the merest events of every-day life, was now lost to her;

so the passion, real, terrible, and deep, the love so long deferred and so long coquetted with, had taken possession of Milly's heart when too late.

Too late, for now he was gone for ever !

Even could she explain now, he could not return for a week without exciting speculation. The die was cast, and in his mind she must ever be viewed through a medium so unlady-like in bearing, so heartless and insulting, that her heart was torn and her pride revolted at the contemplation of it.

Val Reynolds could little know the evil influence he had in the affairs of these two, and no doubt would have choked with laughter, and made the Guards' Club ring with the story of how he had scared Stanley off to the West Indies, by interfering with 'a boshy school-girl crotchet of Milly Allingham about a camellia. Don't you know—by Jove ! ho, ho!—Stanley's not a cavalry-man, but only in the *Feet*, don't you know ?'

In her sudden revulsion of feeling and emotion of genuine shame she almost loathed

poor Reynolds, whose gallantry in picking up and wearing her white camellia with such *empressement* had been the cause of all this pain to her and Stanley.

‘Poor Rowland!’ she loved to repeat again and again in varying cadence; then she would cover her sweet face with her lovely hands and fall once more thinking. But no line of action was left to her now, and, as if to add to the poignancy of her regret, she heard in the drawing-room Fanny Conyers tinkling on the piano and singing,

‘He thinks I do not love him.’

How terribly pathetic it seemed to her now!

‘He thinks I do not love him,
He believes each word I said;
And he sailed away in sorrow
Ere the sun had left his bed.
I’d have told the truth this morning,
But the ship is out of sight;
Oh, I wish these waves would bring him
Where we parted yesternight!’

Though little Fanny’s execution was somewhat inferior to Madame Sainton-Dolby’s,

every word sunk deeply into the reproachful heart of Milly.

To ease the agony of her friend's spirit, Mabel made Tom Seymour telegraph an explanatory message to Stanley, addressed to the ship at Southampton. A reply came back about noon. The Queen had quitted the tidal dock early that morning, and was now bearing down Channel.

Sailed! The brief telegram came to Milly's heart like a sentence of death; for none suffers so much from the passion of love as a coquette when attacked by it. Gone, to return no more—to her at least. Strangely and capriciously as she had treated him, the knowledge that Stanley loved her, would propose again, and be accepted by her with all his tender, delicate, and elegantly-done attentions, which, though so unobtrusive that none save herself actually knew of them, had rendered him necessary to her as a part of herself and of her daily existence. But now all was over between them, and henceforth their paths in life would be lonely and far, far apart.

The evening post brought a brief farewell letter to Tom, written by Stanley after a night that had been sleepless, save 'a few moments of semi-delirious unconsciousness, a very travesty of Nature's sweet restorer.'

'I implored of her that the flower might be her gift to the man *she loved best in the world*,' ran the note; 'and behold, Tom, it was in the breast of Val Reynolds. Thus did she mock and insult me, after all.' He added that his nags were already at Tattersall's; his uniform, &c. were with him. Other things he had elsewhere could be sent after him or to the dépôt. He was decidedly in light marching order and a desperate mood of mind.

Tom felt intensely grieved by his friend's resolution; but, all things considered, it did not surprise him. He knew the pangs of doubt and fear he had himself endured, but he should miss him sorely; for Tom was proud of having such a friend and companion as Rowland Stanley.

And so the long and dreary day—a day

that seemed twelve months in length—passed away. Night and silence came at last, and Milly sobbed herself to sleep, with Stanley's brief letter under her pillow.

END OF VOL. I.



